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ABSTRACT

Droupouts are defined throughout this document (including in its graphic displays) as: early school leavers, expelled, intermittent learners, leftouts, pushouts, stopouts, suspended, and truants. Sufficient research has been done about school dropouts to begin a comprehensive solution. Schools and other institutions must mobilize the knowledge to devise ways of: (1) identifying at risk youth early in their school career, (2) intervening in their personal lives with a unique array of prevention services through longitudinal case management, (3) using skills-training programs to alleviate the crisis of incompetence which alienates dropouts from the labor market, (4) improving training for educators and social service staff, and (5) establishing a state level monitoring agency. In a rebuttal statement by a member of the publication's advisory board, the report is praised for its sense of urgency and commitment, but two caveats are added: (1) research on the problems of dropouts is not yet adequate regarding the implementation or impact of various programs and policies, and (2) ways to coordinate the proposed services to dropouts and at risk youth are vague and lack the framework needed to create an organized efficient agency at the state level. (VM)

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DROPOUTS

IN AMERICA

Enough Is Known for Action

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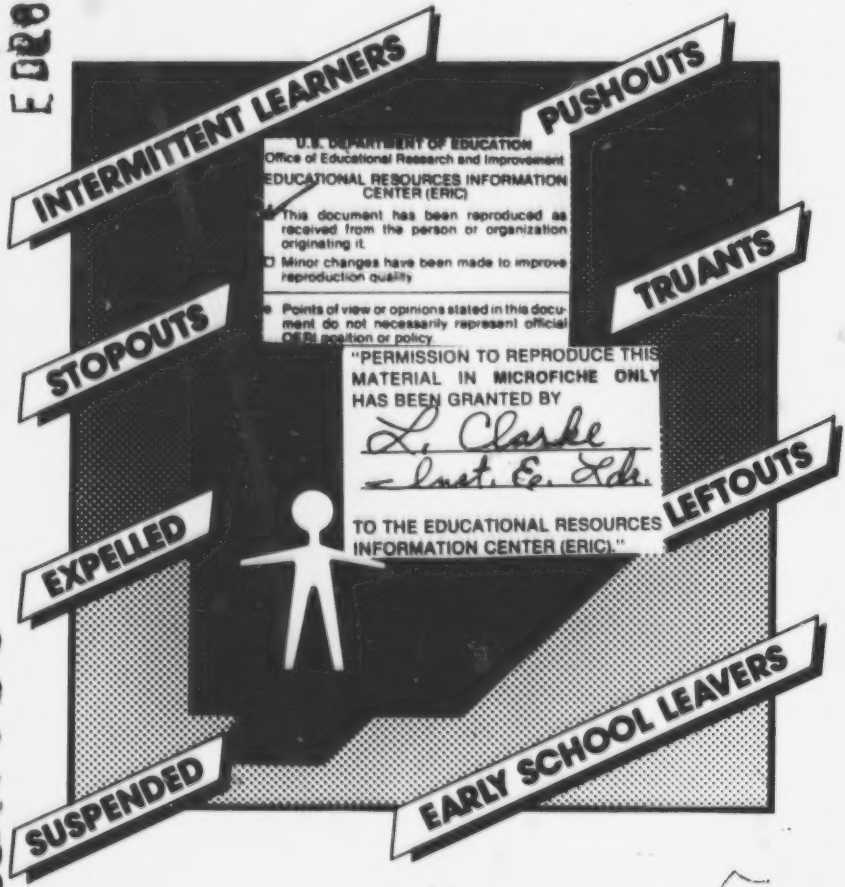

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The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) is a Washington-based non-profit organization dedicated to improving leadership and to promoting development of collaborative problem-solving strategies in education. The Institute operates projects on the national, state, and local levels to meet goals in three major areas:

- **Capacity Building**. Improving the effectiveness of individuals and the capacities of the institutions and agencies for which they work.
- **Strategy Development**. Encouraging the development of collaborative and partnership strategies among the public, private and non-profit sectors for the improvement of education.
- **Information Resources**. Enhancing the information resources available to individuals and organizations and disseminating information through publications, seminars and conferences.

Through its activities, IEL works to meet program planning and staff training needs; establishes links to leaders and policymakers in government, business, journalism and research; convenes diverse groups in order to facilitate collaboration; and provides research and publications on a variety of education issues.

Over the past 22 years, IEL has served 10,000 state legislators, board members and education leaders in 37 state capitals; initiated a national forum program that brings together education and business leaders to examine critical issues in education; and published 44 books and reports on education issues.

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DROPOUTS IN AMERICA

Enough is Known for Action

A Report for Policymakers and Grantsmakers

Pushouts
Stopouts
Leftouts
Truants
Early School Leavers
Expelled/Suspended
Intermittent Learners

by

Andrew Hahn and Jacqueline Danzberger
with Bernard Lefkowitz

Institute for Educational Leadership
Washington, D.C.

March, 1987

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Authors' Note

This document is the final product of a project funded by the Exxon Education Foundation. The project was guided by a distinguished Advisory Group and the results of the project were presented in a national forum in March 1987.

The report follows an earlier publication of the Institute for Educational Leadership, *School Dropouts, Everybody's Problem*, by Sheppard Ranbom which provides an overview of the dropout problem for the general audience. That publication summarized proceedings of a July, 1985 conference in Washington, D.C., made possible by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. This new study presents greater detail about research-based lessons on program and policy effectiveness and is directed, particularly, to policymakers and grantmakers.

Foreword

This IEL report brings a timely and urgent message to leaders in the public and private sectors, and in the philanthropic community. The authors' analysis of research and practice about school dropouts in America encourages informed action. After reading the report, I am convinced that we know far more about school dropouts than public policies and institutional practices currently reflect. This report frames the national demographic realities through which we must view the economic and social consequences of dropping out for individuals (and their families), and for the larger society. Over fifty percent of all families on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) are headed by a high school dropout. This fact alone should impel us to greater action. We must break through the attitudinal and institutional barriers of inertia to make the policy, program and resource allocation decisions required to change and improve schools, social services, employment training, adult literacy programs and health services.

The nation's school retention rate will improve only when increasing numbers of youth make personal decisions that the high school diploma is important, and that they can succeed in school despite complex needs and difficult personal and family situations. The report should disabuse readers of any lingering idea that schools can meet the challenges of successfully educating and retaining at-risk youth without equally committed collaboration and support from all sectors of society. America's school dropout problem does not belong just to the schools—it belongs to the nation. It is a challenge to the business community as much as it is a challenge to the public sector. We must, as a total society, meet this challenge if our national economy is to remain competitive and if we are to prevent social and economic polarization of America's population into the "haves" and the "have nots."

William S. Woodside
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The Advisory Committee members provided guidance to the development of the report and enriched the project with their experience and knowledge.

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Note: The findings and recommendations presented in this report reflect the views of the authors, and may not, in all cases, reflect the specific point of view of the Exxon Education Foundation nor points of view of each individual Advisory Committee member. Readers are directed to the comments of Michael Bailen in the Addendum to this report.

Executive Summary

Dropouts in America
Enough is Known for Action

The Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc. (IEL) received a grant in early 1986 from the Exxon Education Foundation to produce a report encompassing major research to date which would address the major question policymakers and grantmakers are asking about the issue of school completion—do "we" (all of us concerned in America) know enough to attack the problem of school dropouts? The authors' answer in this report is yes! But, the harder question to answer is whether "we" can mobilize the nation to use this knowledge to improve prospects for successful high school completion for America's at-risk children and youth.

The findings and recommendations reflect an exhaustive review of the research and existing programs, and consideration of current policy trends in public education. Three themes central to dropout prevention efforts are discussed:

- intervention must respond to adolescents' distinct and individual needs;
- programs must respond to the many social and economic problems that afflict poor and minority youngsters; and
- dropout prevention must address the crisis of competency that immobilizes many at-risk youths.

Drawing on research data and front-line interviews, the report identifies a number of major risk factors associated with the decision to leave school. These include: falling behind grade level; poor academic performance; repeated detentions and suspensions; adolescent pregnancy; learning disabilities and stress; language difficulties; and the attractions of work. Those regions of the country are identified where the dropout rate is highest and the ages and school years when the incidence of school leaving mounts.

For those youngsters who have already dropped out, prospects are described for reentering the mainstream or alternative schools

and for finding employment. The report distinguishes between youngsters the authors describe as "accessible," those likely to succeed in an alternative school program, a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) program, skills training or other "second chance" program, and those defined as "estranged," who may require a long-term multidimensional rehabilitative effort.

A number of dropout prevention policies are discussed which should begin in the early grades of elementary school and continue through high school. These include: reorientation of grade promotion policies; reform of the current counseling and truant/attendance officer system; integration of comprehensive health and support services; concentrated remediation using individualized instruction; effective school-business collaboration; improved incentives; fulltime and year-round schools; and heightened accountability of the public education system for at-risk students and dropouts at all levels of schooling. The need for improved staff training for educators and social services professionals is emphasized. And, possibly most important to policy change, the case is made for coordinated longitudinal monitoring and individual management of at-risk children throughout their years in public elementary and secondary education.

Opportunities are considered for reaching out to those dropouts unlikely, on their own, to know of and to pursue school re-entry or employment programs. The authors recommend the establishment of an Educational Services Corporation at the state level to provide one-to-one outreach and casework. The report advocates an approach that integrates academic instruction and employment with particular emphasis on the strategy employed by Job Corps. Comparisons are made between short-term programs focused on job placement and programs that provide a range of support services before and during employment. Those elements are identified that appear to make an alternative education program effective—structure, caring and demanding adults, individualized approaches to youths' comprehensive needs, and involvement of community resources.

The report closes with an appeal for a comprehensive, integrated strategy. Such a strategy would include individualized educational approaches, remediation, social services, skills development and employment which incorporate sustained collaboration between the nonprofit and private sectors, government, and public

education—with input from youth and their parents. Emphasis is given to a consistent national effort that resists changes in educational priorities and the vagaries of public policy, or partisan politics.

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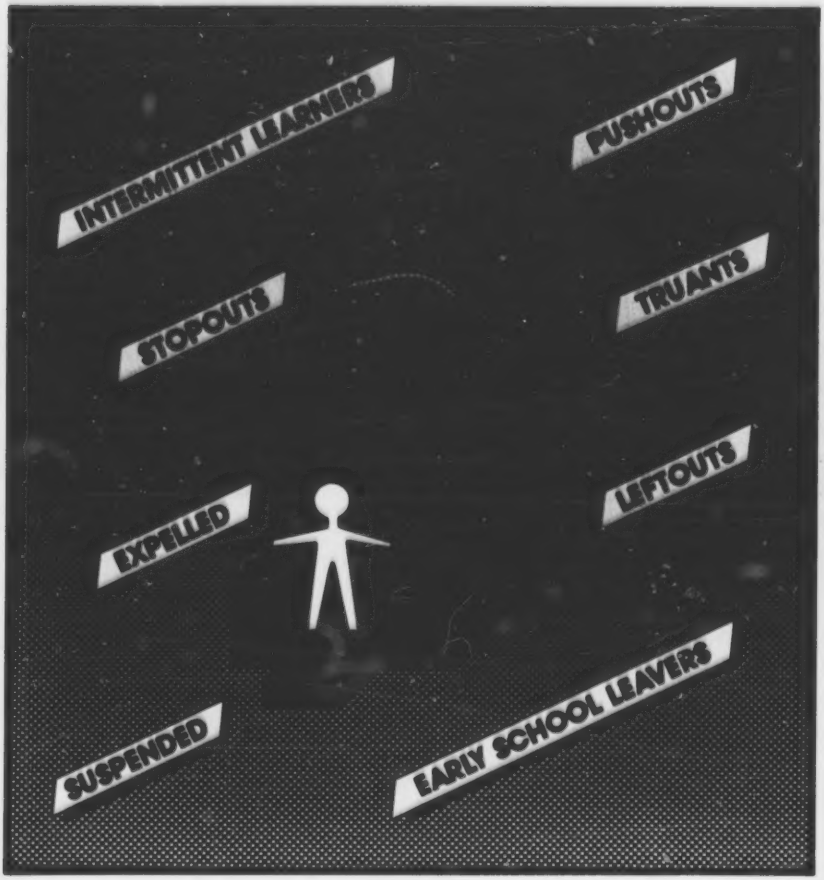
INTRODUCTION


INTERMITTENT LEARNERS
PUSHOUTS
STOPOUTS
TRUANTS
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LEFTOUTS
SUSPENDED
EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Secret Lives.

There are two parts to a child's life. One consists of the public record of growth and development: a birth certificate, the first report card, the results of an I.Q. test, a high school diploma. The second part is composed of thoughts and feelings, of concealed fears and protected visions of the future. This is the undocumented secret history of childhood and adolescence.

This report on dropouts in America, begins at the source: the youngsters and their secrets.

A month before his 17th birthday, Charlie drops out of a high school in Louisville. Charlie is white and poor. Ten years before, his family had come across the state from Harlan County to Louisville and settled in a neighborhood south of the Ohio River that was mostly white, mostly Appalachian, mostly poor and mostly uneducated.

Charlie was two years behind his grade level. "I couldn't see myself continuing up to the twelfth grade, he explains. "I was saying, 'I'll be nineteen, when I get out of here, twenty.' So I wanted a way out—and the school and me, we worked out a way."

The "way out" presented itself when Charlie got into yet another fight with the school guard who caught him smoking in the bathroom. Charlie was suspended from school for two weeks. He never returned. School officials knew something about Charlie: they knew his grades were poor and that he refused to adhere to the school's rules. What they didn't know was that he could take apart and put together a car engine in less than an hour, that to earn spending money he had painted a dozen porches in his neighborhood, and that for six months he had driven a beer truck for his uncle, never once missing a pickup or a delivery. "I knew I

was good for something," Charlie remembers, "but I never could get the school to believe that."

Rosa, on the other hand, is not sure she's good for anything. This 15-year-old high school student in the impoverished Edgewood section of San Antonio sees chaos and violence all around her, and it's hard for her to believe that she has any future at all. A month ago someone shot her grandmother at her front door. A month before that, her uncle was shot and killed on the pavement outside Rosa's house. Her brother has gone from smoking grass and sniffing paint spray to cocaine and heroin. Her closest friend is 14, pregnant and a dropout. "I been missing school a little," she says. "I had to go to all the funerals."

Rosa wants to graduate, but she knows the odds are against her. If she had one wish it would be that "I could live with somebody else. Some place where it's quiet. Some place where sometimes I could do my homework."

There are times when Rosa would like to reveal her secrets to her teachers and counselor, but she keeps quiet because she doesn't think it would change anything. "I wish my teachers knew but they never ask me," she says. "I don't think they care. They're nobody special. Just people like me. Teachers are not gonna do anything, anyway. They're just gonna listen to me. That's all."

Rosa and Charlie are faces in the crowd.[1] They are but two of the many thousands of youngsters in the United States who are at grave risk of dropping out or who have already left school. While all youngsters are distinct individuals, with their own special secrets and aspirations, there are certain recurrent elements in the lives of adolescents who have reached a dead-end in school.

Dropouts and Poverty

Key to the dropout problem is that poor children are more likely to drop out than their more advantaged counterparts. The studies reviewed for this report document the unsurprising fact that the more poor children in a school, the higher the dropout rate. Urban schools where less than 20 percent of the students were poor had a relatively low dropout rate of 13 percent; in districts where more than half of the students were poor, 30 percent or more had dropped out.[2]

This does not suggest that growing up poor by itself determines school failure. But it does say that when the burden of deprivation is not eased by the allocation of resources and the dedication of

concerned and committed adults, it's much harder to succeed. To state the case directly: without a lot of help, it's very difficult for a youngster to overcome the hurdles of poverty.

But that help is not always forthcoming if you are growing up in the abandoned rural communities of Appalachia or in the inner-city neighborhoods of Newark or Chicago. Theodore Sizer, former dean of the Harvard School of Education, wrote:

> The hard fact is that if you are the child of low-income parents the chances are good that you will receive limited and often careless attention from adults in your high school. Most of this is realism that many Americans prefer to keep under the rug, of course; it is no easy task for the poor in America to break out . . . of their economic condition. But a change of status that is a matter of moderately poor odds becomes impossible when there is little encouragement to try.[3]

Race and School Failure

Race is another key element. Breaking out is hard enough when you're poor and white. It's much more difficult when you're poor and a member of a minority group. The surveys examined report that about 13 percent of white students drop out; but, depending on the survey, between 12 and 24 percent of all black students do not complete high school. Some estimates suggest that 40 percent of all Hispanic students leave school before graduation. In some school districts it is estimated that as many as 75 percent of Puerto Ricans drop out. Forty-eight percent of Native Americans drop out.[4]

As Sizer points out, many schools simply assume that their minority students will not graduate. The controlling stereotype, he says, is that "if you're black, you're poor. If you speak English haltingly, you're stupid. If you're white you have a future."[5]

The "Pauper's" System

Another formative element in the life of the dropouts is the education they receive. There seem to be two public school systems in the United States. One, endowed with resources and talent, serves middle-class and affluent white youth. "The other system is a pauper's system," says Josué M. Gonzalez, Associate Superintendent in the Chicago Public Schools.[6]

This second system, in which most of America's poor children are educated, has been largely overlooked in the current wave of educational reform. In 1983 the National Commission on Excel-

lence in Education issued its report "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative of Education Reform."[7] The panel warned against "a rising tide of mediocrity" in the schools and called for a "national commitment to schools and colleges of higher quality throughout the length and breadth of the land." Publication of the report has been followed by at least 30 other national studies and some 290 state commission and blue-ribbon task force reports.

Whatever reforms have been proposed or implemented in the $127 billion public education system—$4,263 for each of the country's nearly 50 million school children—they have not been targeted to those youngsters in greatest need who are the potential and actual school leavers. A study spanning 32 states found only four projects focused on economically disadvantaged youths and six on underachieving youths.[8] This disparity has led Ernest L. Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to observe, "Black and Hispanic students are precisely those who have been least well served by public education. The current debate about school reform is disturbingly silent on this point. Do we mean excellence for all, or for the privileged few?"[9]

This report hopes to help to break the disturbing silence. The report is intended to contribute to the emerging discussion of how the nation can advance the educational and vocational opportunities of its least visible but most rapidly growing and most vulnerable segment of the adolescent population, its poor and minority students.

The "Frontline" Systems

The discussion that follows focuses on the two frontline systems that measure and certify progress and achievement for poor and minority youngsters—the schools and the training and employment system. First, the existing limitations of the schools as they try to respond to the needs of students who are at risk are discussed; and opportunities for innovation and reform of the schools (including alternative and second-chance programs) are considered.

The second area of interest is the development of vocational and employment skills to increase access to the mainstream economy—access that, up to now, has been denied many of these youngsters. A number of the most promising in- and out-of-school

programs are discussed. In addition, initiatives are identified that, in our view, appear to be *least* productive.

Three primary themes underly the discussion. The first assumption is that no single approach or strategy will prove effective for *all* children and adolescents in difficulty. What works for a pregnant dropout or teenage mother may not meet the needs of an adolescent who leaves school to take a job. Similarly, a youngster like Rosa, who has performed fairly well in school but whose family life is in disarray, may require different support and guidance than Charlie, who has fallen far behind his grade level. It is not practical to formulate broad policy customized to the individual needs of each student, but it is critical that initiatives in education and employment respond to the different segments of the youth population. Youngsters in trouble in school and at the workplace do not constitute an undifferentiated mass. Therefore, efforts to intervene on their behalf must respond to their distinct and varied needs.

A second compelling theme is the need to respond to a youngster's *entire* life. What is happening to a child like Rosa outside of school, in her home and community, may determine her classroom success as much as her intelligence, talent, and perseverance. If intervention is to be effective, it must start with an understanding of the world Rosa enters when she leaves school every afternoon. This may require a far greater integration and coordination of the social services, child welfare and educational systems than has been attempted up to now.

Finally, the discussion is shaped by the awareness that most poor youngsters at risk suffer from a devastating crisis of competency. Many schools do not expect them to succeed. As one analyst has observed, "So many of these kids believe they are competent at only one thing—consuming. Nothing that's ever happened to them leads them to believe they can do anything, that they have any value aside from as a consumer."[10] The most critical element in any effort to reclaim these youngsters is to persuade them that they can produce and perform in school and on the job.

- *Targeting programs to different segments of the at-risk population.*
- *Responding to a child's entire life.*
- *Restoring confidence by persuading a confused and insecure adolescent that he or she can be competent.*

These themes provide a framework for this report's discussion of research findings and program practices directed toward potential and actual dropouts.

If there is an undercurrent of urgency in this discussion, it is because we believe the stakes are very high—for the dropout and for the nation as a whole. In 1985 one estimate put the loss in adjusted lifetime earnings for a male dropout at $187,000 and for a female dropout at $122,000.[11] For the nation, the costs of dropping out reach into the billions in the form of lost tax revenues, welfare and unemployment expenditures, and crime prevention funds. One national study estimated that the losses ranged from $60 billion to $228 billion. Even the lower estimate amounted to approximately $60,000 for each dropout.[12]

These losses are not acceptable or inevitable. An investment now can reduce these losses substantially. How and where the nation can make this investment with a maximum return for this and future generations of American adolescents is the subject of this report.

Endnotes

1. The descriptions of Charlie and Rosa appeared originally in Bernard Lefkowitz's *Tough Change: Growing Up on Your Own in America*, (Free Press, New York: January 1987), pp. 68-71, 141-146.
2. These data are from a Brandeis University, Center for Human Resources survey of large urban secondary schools in cities of over 100,000 population. The dropout rates are based on self-reported information from 104 cities reponding to a survey.
3. Theodore B. Sizer, *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston: 1984) pp. 36-37.
4. These statistics come from four sources:(a) Government Accounting Office, *Dropouts: The Extent and Nature of the Problem.* (Washington, D.C.: June 1986), (b) National Center for Educational Statistics Bulletin "High School Dropouts: Descriptive Information from *High School and Beyond* " (U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C.: November, 1983) and Samual Peng, *High School Dropouts: A National Concern*, U.S. Department of Education, prepared for the Business Advisory Commission, (Education Commission of the States, Denver: March 1985), (c) Hispanic Policy Development Project, National Commission on Secondary Schooling for Hispanics, "Make Something Happen" (Washington, D.C.: 1984), (d) National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, National Education Association, "Dropping Out: The Quiet Killer of the American Dream," (Washington, D.C.:1986).

5. Sizer, *Horace's Compromise*.
6. Gonzalez's comments appear in "Renegotiating Society's Contract with the Public Schools" in *Carnegie Quarterly* (Carnegie Corporation: Winter 1985), p.4.
7. National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform*, (Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.: 1983).
8. MDC, Inc., *The States' Excellence in Education Commissions: Who's Looking Out for At-Risk Youth*, (Chapel Hill, N.C.: 1985).

   There have been some notable state initiatives on behalf of at-risk youth since the publication of the MDC report, including programs in New York, Michigan, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Wisconsin, New Jersey, Massachusetts, South Carolina, California, Colorado, Idaho, Arkansas, and Illinois. Some writers warn, however, that various state education reforms will actually contribute to higher dropout rates by raising standards. See, for example, Edward McDill, Gary Natriello and Aaron Pallas, "Raising Standards and Retaining Students: The Impact of the Reform Recommendations on Potential Dropouts," (Johns Hopkins University, Center for Social Organization of Schools, Baltimore: April 1985).
9. Ernest L. Boyer, "The Test of Growing Student Diversity," *New York Times*, November 11, 1984. See also, "U.S. Remedial Aid Misses Neediest, E.D. Study Finds," *Education Week*, (Washington, D.C.: June 11, 1986).
10. Lefkowitz, op.cit.
11. James S. Catterall, "On the Social Costs of Dropping Out of School," (Stanford Education Policy Institute: Stanford University, Stanford, California, 1985).
12. Ibid.

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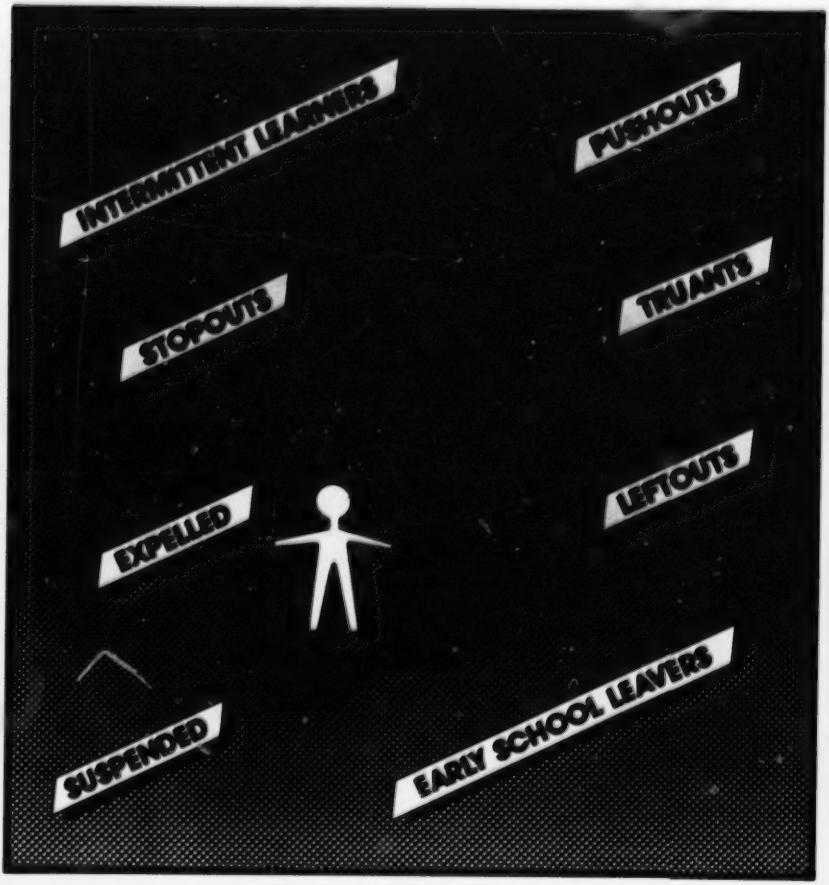
DROPPING OUT: WHO, WHY, WHEN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EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

Chapter Two

DROPPING OUT: WHO, WHY, WHEN

Most social initiatives build on a foundation of accurate, verifiable data. When attempts are made to address the problems and needs of potential and actual dropouts, many of the essential data are lacking. On a national basis, there are informed estimates of how many students are dropping out, how many are poor and minority, and how many are doing well or poorly in school. But on the level that really counts, in local school districts and individual schools, the data are sorely deficient. It should be emphasized, therefore, that the following profile of the dropout population is largely based on national, state and occasional local estimates, a circumstance that severely hampers the development of programs targeted to individual communities and schools.

Who Drops Out?

The Local Level

Among the thousands of school districts in the United States, it sometimes seems no two count dropouts in the same way. School administrators say they follow local or state procedures to calculate the annual number of dropouts. But, in fact, their statistics are not always accurate, and their methods of calculating the dropout rate vary from year to year, from school to school. In part, this is because in many localities, no central state or citywide authority rigorously scrutinizes the dropout count or methodologies for compiling school leavers.

In California, a public policy organization interviewed some 1,900 recent dropouts and found that, in many instances, their departure was not reflected in the enrollment statistics. "In California no one asks the schools for their dropout rates; there is little incentive for them to collect such data," the authors wrote. "Some

school administrators express fear that such an investigation might uncover a 'can of worms' that the public might interpret as yet another indictment of the schools."[1]

Statistical manipulations have the effect of trivializing a significant social and educational problem. In Chicago, for example, students who leave school before graduation are grouped in 19 separate categories called "leave codes." Only one of these categories is labeled "dropout." Among the other categories are "lost - not coming to school;" "needed at home;" "married;" "cannot adjust." As a result, only a small number of school leavers are actually listed as dropouts.

In addition, dropout rates in Chicago have been tabulated annually, rather than according to how many starting freshmen actually receive diplomas four years later. Thus, if 15 percent of a freshman high school class drops out in a given year the official dropout rate is put at 15 percent. Yet, four years later when the students gather in the school auditorium to receive their diplomas, only half of the original class may still be in school. Using a multi-year tracking system based on graduation statistics, the Chicago Board of Education found that the city's dropout rate was 50.7 percent. Even more surprising was the high rate among *all* students: 38 percent for whites, 56 percent for blacks and 57 percent for Hispanics. The clear conclusion of the report was that dropping out is not a problem confined to a handful of minority students who can't learn, but a *systemic* failure.[2]

There are other questionable practices in counting students and dropouts. Some administrators maintain "ghost students" on the rolls to increase or maintain their share of state average daily membership (ADM) or average daily attendance (ADA) funds. They "forget" to discharge students who have been truant beyond the legal maximum, usually 20 days. One independent investigator, Father Charles L. Kyle of St. Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Church in Chicago, used student ID numbers to track 121 students who were listed as transfers to another Chicago public school. He found that 42 (or 35 percent) carried on the rolls of the school system had not enrolled in any public school.[3]

The underestimation of the dropout rate on the local level raises serious issues of public accountability. Until a uniform and accurate system of calculating the dropout rate is developed by local school systems, dropout prevention efforts will continue to be directed toward a small number of "troubled teens" rather than

the majority of students in some inner-city schools who will leave or are at risk of leaving before commencement day.

To count dropouts, the U.S. Government Accounting Office uses the all-inclusive definition adopted by the Current Population Survey, which polls a national sample of households representative of the working age civilian population. The Current Population Survey (CPS) defines dropouts as "persons neither enrolled in schools nor high school graduates." It doesn't exclude from this definition such categories as "pregnant teenagers" or "needed at home." If you aren't in school and you haven't graduated you're a dropout.

Recommendation:

The CPS definition should be used in those systems and schools that are designing and implementing dropout prevention programs. Schools should collect such data longitudinally, from freshman year through graduation.

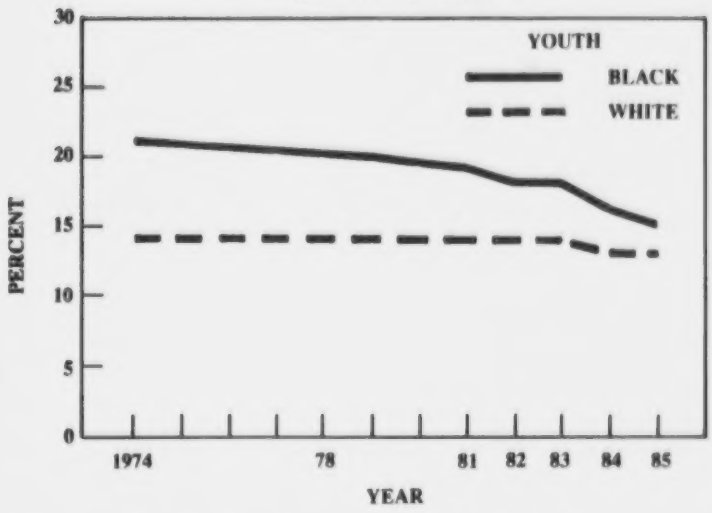
The National Count

Data compiled nationally help to answer some central questions about the dropout population. Is the dropout rate increasing? Do more males than females drop out? Are the poor and minorities at greater risk? Is the dropout rate higher for older adolescents? Which regions of the country have the highest incidence of dropping out? Is the dropout rate highest in schools with the least resources?

The General Accounting Office reports that, in 1985, 4.3 million 16-24 year olds dropped out — 13 percent of that age group. Of these, 3.5 million were white, 700,000 were black, and 100,000 were from other groups. Moreover, male dropouts outnumbered female dropouts: approximately 16 percent of young men between the ages of 18 and 19 were dropouts compared to 12% of similarly aged women.[4]

Are Dropout Rates Getting Worse? No. The public has been led to believe headlines proclaiming "record" high dropout figures. Actually, in the 1960s the proportion of dropouts in the 16-24 year old age group was about 20 percent. Since then, the rate has declined and remained steady at about 13-14 percent. Among black youth, the rate fell from 21 percent in 1974 to 15 percent in October 1985. (See Figure 1)

Dropout Rates of Black and White Youth Age 16–24 (Oct. 1974–Oct. 1985)



Note: For 1974, the black dropout rate covers "black and other races."

Source: Adapted from tabulations from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, October 1983–October 1985; and from Bureau of Labor Statistics Bulletin 2192, Special Labor Force Report 233, and Special Labor Force Report 180.

Primary Source: This figure appears as Figure 1 in *School Dropouts: The Extent and Nature of the Problem*, Government Accounting Office, Washington, D.C., June 1986, p. 6.

Are Disadvantaged Students at Risk of Dropping Out? Yes. While other data sources are less reliable than the CPS for tracking changes over time, they do shed light on some additional dimensions of the dropout problem.

The *High School and Beyond Study* (HBS) found that about 14 percent of the sophomores surveyed in 1980 did not complete high school by their expected graduation date in 1982. On every reasonable indicator of "hardship" — low income, low skill wage, limited educational background — the disadvantaged respondents

(17 percent) were three times more likely to be school dropouts than the advantaged (5 percent).[5]

A survey of data for this study found that school leaving rates tended to increase with the proportion of the school body classified as poor. For instance, city schools in which less than 20 percent of the student body were poor, had a dropout rate of 13 percent. In schools where over one half of the students lived in poverty, the dropout rates were 30 percent. Other studies have concluded that dropout rates are highest in schools where the minority population of a generally low-income student body is large.

Are students in certain parts of the country at greater risk? Yes. A study conducted for this publication found notable self-reported differences by both region and size of city.

The Southwestern states suffered the highest dropout rates of 21 percent, with 18 percent in the Northeast, 11 percent in the Southeast, and 9 percent in the Northwest. Dropout rates were lowest in the Midwest where student bodies are more homogeneous and where the suburban/small town character of a greater percentage of the schools often means small class sizes. As might have been expected, dropout rates were twice as high in the larger cities than in the smaller cities (25 percent vs. 13 percent).

Does a scarcity of resources in some high schools lead to a higher dropout rate? The answer to this question is a qualified yes. Almost 30 years ago former Harvard University President James B. Conant wrote that the difference in spending for suburban schools and inner-city schools "challenges the concept of equality of opportunity in American public education."[6] That inequality in spending persists today. In Texas and Massachusetts, affluent districts spend as much as $4,000 more per child than in poor districts. In Kentucky, $30,000 more per classroom is spent in wealthy districts than is spent in poor ones.

Some researchers contend that the expenditures are less significant in affecting dropout rates than how a school is organized, the quality of teaching and administration, and innovations in the curricula. One analyst, Harold Hodgkinson, examined state retention rates in 1985 and found that teacher salary and per pupil expenditure were not related to dropout rates while teacher/student ratios did correlate with the incidence of dropping out. He concluded that dropout rates among schools with the most favorable teacher/student ratios were less than two-thirds as great as among schools with the worst ratios.[7] However, it should be

pointed out that improving the student-teacher ratio may require the employment of additional teachers. And that takes money. Preventing students from dropping out may also involve retraining and increasing the number of counselors; implementing a comprehensive health and family planning program; providing infant care facilities in the school for teen-age mothers; developing a cooperative work-education program; offering remedial instruction and establishing a liaison between the school and social service agencies in the community. All of this takes money. The absence of these components in a dropout prevention effort is an important policy deficiency. *A committed, creative faculty and administration can assuage the sense of abandonment and neglect felt by so many disadvantaged students.*

Recommendation:

School districts should commit to providing significant resources and assuring more equitable expenditures throughout their systems in order to improve failing schools.

This raises the issue of how additional funds should be spent and where they can do the most good. A review of the principal reasons why youngsters drop out may provide a rough blueprint for how additional resources should be allocated most effectively.

Why Students Drop Out

What Students Say

Students report many reasons for dropping out—poor grades, dislike for school, alienation from peers, marriage or pregnancy, and employment. The "good" son or daughter may leave school to help parents and siblings though a financial crisis. The most common explanation for leaving school, however, is poor academic performance; 42 percent of the dropouts in *High School and Beyond* (HSB) reported getting mostly D's in school. Males generally cite school and employment factors more than females, who cite marriage more than their male counterparts. ("Had to support family," however, was listed by 13 percent of the male dropouts as compared to 8 percent of the female dropouts.)[8]

Many respondents who cite "poor grades" may really mean "school wasn't for me." When estranged youth in New York City were asked why they had difficulty in school, a little more than one-third blamed themselves, another third pegged the problem

on their home life or other factors beyond their control, while the remaining third faulted the schools.[9] Dropouts themselves are divided; there is no single essential factor.

Youth at risk of dropping out resist the social control, competition, and order that characterizes classrooms. In the HSB survey, one in five young male dropouts indicated they couldn't get along with their teachers; more than one in ten had been expelled or suspended. In the following section, more is said about how students react to the way many inner-city schools are organized and how the schools treat students; consideration is given to how the expectation of failure among faculty and administrators may constitute a self-fulfilling prophecy, and how the harsh penalties of suspension and expulsion may be applied disproportionately to minority and disadvantaged students. In effect, such penalties may be interpreted as an "invitation" to drop out.

First, consider one reason some students give for leaving school—the need to find a job. Some research organizations report that up to 40 percent of Hispanic male dropouts say they left school to find employment because they need the money.[10] However, when researchers probe more deeply, they may find that money is not the primary reason.

At Benito Juarez High School in Chicago, some 500 students, most of them poor and Hispanic, were asked why so many drop out. Only eight percent thought it was because they were looking for employment. Most said the important factors were the attitudes of parents, the influence of gangs in the school and the community, and the behavior of teachers and peers. James Vasquez, school superintendent in the impoverished Edgewood district of San Antonio, observes, "It's a copout to say that jobs are the most important reasons for kids leaving. I don't believe that at all. I think what has crippled these kids is the attitude that's been drummed into them that they can't possibly achieve anything, that they will never be better than they are at 15."[11]

To extend Vasquez's argument, picture a 16-year-old on the verge of dropping out. Most of his friends are already on the street. He's a grade or two behind in school. He has trouble reading English. No one has told him that he can be competent in school, that he can achieve. The workplace he believes—no matter how mistaken this belief—may be the only setting in which he can succeed, where he can establish his value, his status as a productive human being.

Something more significant than money may be motivating youngsters: the hunger for an opportunity to demonstrate competency. Consideration of some of the major personal and institutional conditions that foreshadow the decision to drop out produces one theme that permeates virtually every element of intellectual and social endeavor: the deeply ingrained sense of personal failure, of individual worthlessness.

Danger Signals

What are the conditions that prefigure the decision to leave school?

A review of the many studies on this subject suggests that the severe consequences of dropping out are concentrated among a small proportion of youth with distinctive characteristics. The following are the major risk factors identified in a variety of studies on the chronic dropout problem.

Behind in Grade Level and Older Than Classmates

Approximately one third of all high school students are behind modal grade by one year and another five percent by at least two years. The *Harvard Education Letter* published a synthesis of studies that clearly shows that students held back actually score worse on achievement tests than similar youngsters passed along to their next grade. Many of the students retained have low opinions of themselves. They also appear to have fewer friends than promoted students.[12]

A study by the Chicago Panel on Public School Finances (1986) found that overage students, even if reading at higher levels than their normal aged peers, are 7 to 10 percent more likely to drop-out.[13] In other words, the blow to student self-esteem caused by school retention policies is so severe as to cancel the positive effects of good reading skills. Put differently, the good reader who is overage is more likely to drop out than the poor reader who is the proper age for his or her class.

Clearly, chronological age and social skills have an affect on whether a student is promoted. Recent National Assessment of Educational Progress findings indicate that the youngest members of a class are three times more likely to be behind their expected grade placement than their classmates.[14] Many emotionally immature youth are held back because they either act inappropriately

in the classroom, or they are literally too young. In either case, they have not acquired the prerequisite social skills for learning.

Flunking a grade in school has multiple effects. Students held back a grade are up to 4 times more likely to dropout than those who are not. The reason is simple: students hate being "too old" for the class. "Overage" was the reason cited by 41 percent of Los Angeles dropouts in surveys between 1981-1984.[15]

But students aren't the only ones who don't like overage students; school administrators begin to discharge these youth as soon as they pass the legal age limit (e.g., 17 years). The process can be rationalized, ridding the school of "troublemakers," but it can also prompt a wholesale cleanup of the school roster. For instance, all students over age 17 with more than 20 days of truancy might be summoned to the school and instructed to bring a parent or guardian. If students or parents do not show up, the students may be discharged or counseled to take their learning elsewhere. In both cases, the dropout rate increases. Alternative practices, such as counseling students that they have the right to stay in school until the age of 21, are hardly known and rarely implemented.

Academic Performance

The National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983 reported that, nationwide, the average performance of high school students on most standardized tests is now lower than in 1960 when the U.S. Government dramatically increased federal support for public education. The National Assessment of Educational Progress revealed that only 23 percent of young adults with less than eight years of education can write a letter describing an error in a bill.[16] Such skill deficits have been linked to both the school dropout and the youth unemployment problems.

Study after study has documented the low reading, writing, math, science, speaking/listening, and reasoning abilities of potential and actual dropouts. The "functional" handicaps of these youth have also been highlighted—the difficulty they have in reading job notices, filling out job applications, applying for a driver's license, and calculating overtime on the job.

School dropout studies in Boston and elsewhere show that dropouts are more likely to have failed, not taken, or scored low in proficiency examinations than other students. In California, 41,000

students out of 98,000 left 12th grade because they failed graduation examinations or courses needed to graduate.[17]

A number of studies have argued that dropouts have the same abilities as high school graduates who decide not to go on to college. These studies make the case that abilities, as measured by I.Q. and standardized tests of achievement, are of secondary importance to poor grades and grade promotion in predicting school leaving. One analyst, Andrew Sum, concludes, however, that basic skills abilities are the single best predictor of dropout behavior. His conclusion is based on:

- Analysis of the Armed Forces Qualifying Test (AFQT) scores, which show that for males and females, whites, blacks, and Hispanics, and for youth in every single age group 15 to 18, low test scores coincide with being behind in grade.
- Findings which show that among 16-17 year olds in 1979 in the National Longitudinal Survey (NLS), a majority (50.3 percent) of all dropouts had basic skills in the bottom 20 percent of the test score distribution.
- The NLS finding that "16-17 year olds with basic skills test scores in the bottom 20 percent of the test score distribution were 14 times more likely than those in the upper 20 percent to have dropped out at the time of the 1979 NLS interview."[18]

Whether one focuses on grades or basic skills abilities, dropouts are the classic "underachiever." Many do not see the value in homework, and all too many come from households where there is little support for homework or outside academic enrichments. Sadly, the dropouts' slide is not detected immediately by school authorities or parents. **If there is a bottom line in the dropout literature, it is that with early detection more students could have been helped.**

Dislike School

This vague explanation given by many dropouts cuts across nearly all others. Just over one-third of *High School and Beyond* dropouts cited this reason, males more often than females. One male dropout's recollection is revealing: "In the regular school I felt in prison. The rules, guards, and door locking after the late bell. No remedial or reading programs were offered to me in the 9th grade where I really needed it. I knew the rules like walking in the halls, but I did not catch on to the learning. No one took time with me."

Some students are scared to death, and many potential dropouts feel tremendous insecurity when they enter the school yard each day. Studies in the Chicago area have found that young people list fear of gang members (estimated at over 10,000 in Chicago) in and around schools as the primary reason for leaving school.[19]

Detention and Suspension

One concrete reason that so many potential dropouts dislike school is that they are frequently placed on in-school detention or suspended. The Children's Defense Fund has found that at least 25 percent of all dropouts had been suspended before they dropped out and that another 20 percent had been designated as "behavior problems" by their teachers.[20]

In 1985, studies by two national panels, the National Commission on Secondary Education for Hispanics and the National Board of Inquiry into Schools, reported that most high school suspensions are for nonthreatening behavior.[21] According to the panels, the most common reason given by school personnel for suspension is "defiance of authority," followed by "chronic tardiness," "chronic absence" and "profanity or vulgarity." The negative effect of repeated suspensions, the panels concluded, is severe. Not only are suspensions ineffective in encouraging good discipline, but they keep students out of class and alienate them from school. When suspensions are ordered, due process is often neglected; a student's explanation counts for little, and an accusation becomes proof of guilt.

Disciplinary action—whether corporal punishment, detention or suspension—is imposed disproportionately on minority students. The two national panels found that black high school students are suspended three times as often as whites. While minority students comprise about 25 percent of the school population, they constitute about 40 percent of all suspended and expelled students. Studies by the U.S. Office of Civil Rights show that black students are also over one-and-a-half times more likely than white students to receive corporal punishment.[22]

Pregnancy

Four out of five girls who become pregnant in high school drop out as compared to less than 10 percent of those who are childless. Pregnancy is the most common reason females leave school. Harold Hodgkinson, in a report published by the Institute for Edu-

cational Leadership, writes that every day 1540 adolescent girls give birth to a child. Each year, 1.2 million American teens get pregnant. Of these young women, more than 400,000 abort their pregancies, and 420,000 have their babies. The social costs of this disaster are enormous. The Center for Population Statistics estimates that it will cost society $16 billion dollars to support the first born infants of teenagers over the next 20 years.[23]

Welfare and the Single Parent Household

Youngsters in Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) households, where a single parent juggles many roles and the family has little income, often must scramble to attain the emotional and material support they need to continue their studies. Although some of these youth succeed, far too many fail.

Dropouts are three times more likely than high school graduates to come from families that receive welfare. Robert Lerman, (1986) found that about 18 percent of all dropouts ages 14 to 21 live in families on AFDC, while only 5 percent of high school graduates rely on this aid.[24]

The Attractiveness of Work

As has been suggested previously, the work world often seems like the only alternative for youngsters in trouble in school. The sad fact is that, for most of them, their hopes and expectations will not be fulfilled. Many leave school to take entry level jobs that offer only limited employment potential. They rarely understand how careers are begun, and they underestimate the value of schooling and formal credentials. As one dropout put it, "How could I think of the future when I was so busy messing up the present?"

Stated bluntly, dropouts' long term employment prospects are dismal. In 1985, half of all unemployed youth (16-24) were not in school. In part this was because many dropouts have unrealistic wage expectations, or lack information concerning job search skills and the requirements of entry level employment.

School personnel have failed to teach students what awaits them when they drop out for work. Perhaps every school bulletin board should post monthly statistics on the fate of school leavers. This is what the bulletin board for October 1985 would indicate about joblessness:

THIS MONTH THE JOBLESS RATE FOR WHITES WHO DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL IS 47 PERCENT. FOR BLACKS IT IS 73 PERCENT. STAY IN SCHOOL! THE ODDS ARE AGAINST YOU IF YOU TRY TO MAKE IT IN THE JOB MARKET.

In programmatic and policy terms, it is very important to recognize that most studies show that regardless of how badly youngsters have fared in school, they are strongly motivated to succeed in the workplace. The studies show that these youngsters want to work and *do work* when opportunities are available.[25] If anything, the problem may be that the work motivation is too strong for the schools to hold students. More than a quarter of the males in the *High School and Beyond Study*, for example, who left school were offered a job and chose to work rather than to continue their education.

The Attraction of Military Service

For many dropouts, in the later years of adolescence, the military is the "safety net" of last resort. In recent years, up to a third of new enrollees in our Armed Services have not completed high school. Unfortunately, however, nearly half of those who entered the Army in 1981 without high school diplomas were not thought capable of completing their first tour of duty.[26] What school leavers don't understand or discover only when it's too late is that only the better qualified recruits find temporary or permanent careers in the military. Currently, high school completion or the GED are criteria for acceptance into the military.

Not Enrolled in a College Preparatory Program

The vocational education system in the United States is in retreat. Accused in numerous studies of not producing lasting benefits for participants, the vocational system faces vigorous competition from community colleges and challenges from school boards who question the very purpose of vocational education. To make matters worse, vocational program dropout rates are

higher than in academic programs. Today the vocational education system has been refocused by Congress to concentrate on the poor. However, this may have the unintended consequence of further raising dropout rates.

Undiagnosed Learning Disabilities and Emotional Problems

There is little research that specifically links dropping out to learning disabilities and emotional problems. Estimates of the learning disabled population range from 5 to 10 percent of secondary school students. Yet some studies have found that less than 3 percent of this group are diagnosed by schools. On the other hand, advocacy organizations contend that disadvantaged minority students, who have a hard time coping with family distress and crumbling communities, are conveniently dumped into classes for the learning disabled. They estimate that black students are more than three times as likely to be in a class for the educable mentally retarded as are white students, but only half as likely to be in a class for the gifted and talented.

Either way, the student's growing sense of dislocation and frustration is reinforced. The youngster who is misdiagnosed as learning disabled accepts the school's judgment that he or she is an academic misfit. The youngster whose disabilities are not identified and treated blames himself for his incapacity to function.

There are no comprehensive studies that measure the scope and effect of emotional problems among the high school population. But certainly, one indicator of stress is the incidence of drug use. A key finding from the University of Michigan's 11th annual survey of 16,000 students in American high schools was that a five-year decline in drug use appears to be over. Drugs, especially the hard drugs like PCP and cocaine, are again on the rise.

As health care clinics are established in schools, an alarming incidence of stress-related illnesses is being reported. In Kansas City a comprehensive adolescent treatment program was established at a high school where most of the students were poor and black.[27] In a six-month period from October 1982 to March 1983, the health center reported 370 cases involving psychological and emotional stress.

Language Difficulties

Some school districts today are faced with student bodies speaking more than 100 languages. For years, debate has raged between

proponents of English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual education—should new arrivals in our schools be "immersed" immediately in classes taught only in English (having to learn English quickly in order to follow their other subjects) or should students learn academic skills in their native language until their English is good enough for them to enter mainstream classes? Whatever the merits of each position, the fact is that the nation's largest student language minority, Hispanics, have only a minority in bilingual education, and there are few comprehensive educational policies focused on all these children and youth. A recent representative survey by the Council of the Great City Schools of 10 of its 36 member school systems (these 10 districts enroll 26% of all Hispanic students) concludes that the focus of attention has been on the issue of bilingual education serving a limited number of students while many Hispanic students slip through the cracks.[28]

In 1971, Massachusetts passed an innovative bilingual education law motivated by a discouraging report that Hispanic children were not enrolled in school, and that truancy laws were selectively enforced. Now, there is growing awareness in most states that Hispanic dropout (and achievement) rates are intolerable. Proficiency in English is clearly a major issue, but it is difficult to control for the language variable in isolating causes for these high dropout rates. Studies do show that 25% of Hispanic youth are 2 years behind at the end of 8th grade. There is evidence that three times as many Spanish language background Hispanic students drop out during 10th grade or earlier as do English language background Hispanic youth.

Consideration of the role of language barriers raises many questions. Is the problem language barriers or confusion over educational policy? Is there evidence to reject bilingual education in favor of ESL? Is the problem that many youngsters with language barriers do not participate in either one? Will educational policymakers and practitioners move away from the historic confrontation toward flexible language development programs based on what works best with these youngsters based on individual circumstances? How much of the problem is language and how much is poverty and other factors affecting disadvantaged children and youth? Hispanics are not poorer as a population group than blacks — yet, Hispanic dropout rates are higher. Nobody knows for certain whether language is the determining factor explaining higher dropout rates among Hispanics compared to other at-risk youth,

but clearly language is a critical element in achieving success in school, and outside. We do know that comprehensive educational policies for children and youth facing language barriers in school are the rare exception rather than the rule.

From academic performance to repeated suspensions and detentions, from language barriers to emotional stress—it is a disheartening list of risk factors. However, the fact that we can now identify the critical elements that foreshadow the decision to drop out provides some reason for optimism. If schools can begin to respond to these difficulties, the dropout rate may be significantly diminished. In subsequent sections of this report, various approaches and strategies are proposed that could ameliorate, if not entirely surmount the impediments to completing high school. Again, it must be emphasized that there is no single cure for all of these problems. But step by step, problem by problem, the schools and other concerned institutions can make an impact on the struggling student, now and in the future.

When Do Students Drop Out?

If there is a bottom line in the dropout literature, it is that, with early detection, more students could have been helped. School district studies have identified the grades that pose the greatest risk to dropout prone youth. Although the precise grades may vary from place to place, Boston found that its dropouts leave not when turning 16, but more likely at 17 or 18 and having progressed no further than the 10th or 11th grades.[29] In California, the periods between 11th and 12th grade and between the start of 12th grade and graduation are those of greatest attrition. A dramatic increase in 12th grade attrition was documented by California from 9 percent in 1977 to 34 percent in 1983.[30]

Andrew Sum's research in 1986 shows that about one-third of all 18-24 year old dropouts left school prior to completing tenth grade.[31] Prevention programs that start in the junior and senior year of high school are just too little, too late.

In California, researchers believe that class attrition varies by ethnic group. Whites, for example leave school at earlier ages than minorities, but all dropouts tend to be overage for grade. For example, 55 percent of all white dropouts left school between ages 16 and 17, whereas 58-61 percent of minority dropouts left school at ages 17 and 18.

It is amazing that the question "when do students drop out" cannot be answered with more precision. The reasons have been stated earlier: few school districts track youth over time and there are no uniform standards for measurement.

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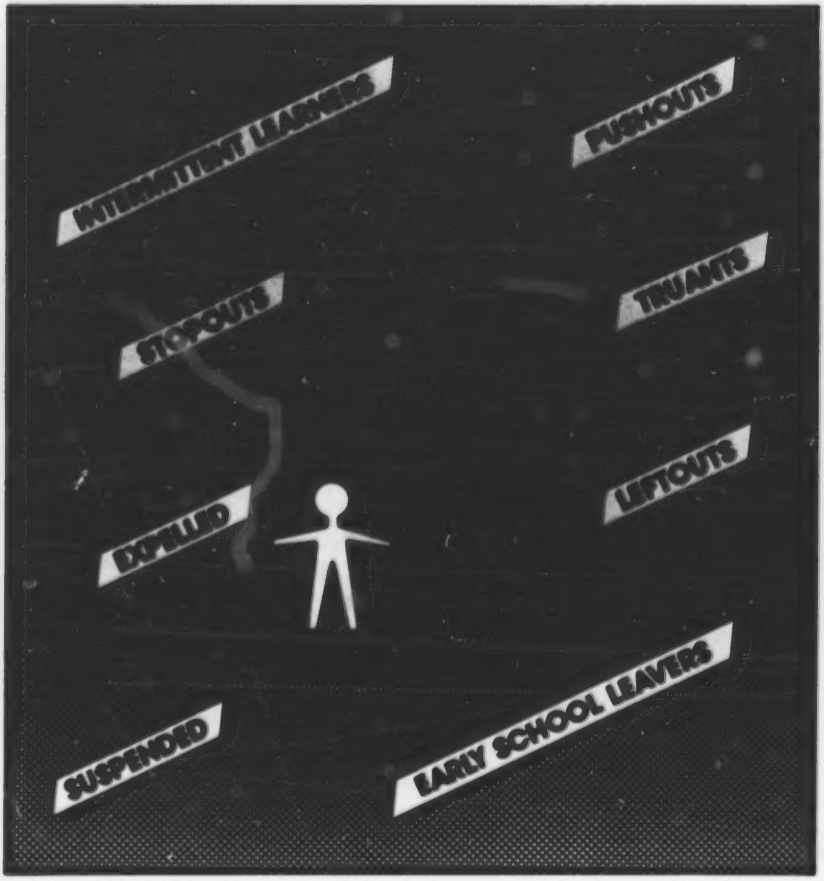
3

DROPOUT PREVENTION


INTERMITTENT LEARNERS
PUSHOUTS
STOPOUTS
TRUANTS
EXPELLED
LEFTOUTS
SUSPENDED
EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

Chapter Three

DROPOUT PREVENTION

This discussion of prevention strategies draws from the formal literature evaluating dropout prevention programs and from interviews with youth workers in the field. The lessons drawn from this research are relevant to two areas: the pre-school, primary, and middle school years, when problems can be "nipped in the bud," and the high school years, when most students drop out.

The discussion proceeds on two levels. For each topic, some broad policy changes and innovations are outlined, and these are followed by discussion of opportunities to improve the performance of schools and reduce the dropout rate.

The Early School Years

This report supports the view of researchers who see education from pre-school to high school graduation as a continuum. The value of this perspective was described by Harold Hodgkinson:

> ". . . if the people can begin to see the educational system as a single entity through which people move, they may begin to behave as if all of education were related . . . By knowing who is entering the system and how well they are progressing, everyone at all levels will have time to develop effective programs for the maximum educational gains of all students."[1]

From this vantage point, the difficulties and reverses suffered by very young children, early in their school experience, can be identified and overcome as the youngster proceeds through the educational system. If the difficulties are ignored or avoided, they multiply. This is particularly true when young children are held back while their friends and peers advance through the system.

Grade Promotion Policies

As has been indicated earlier, the dropout rate among students who have repeated one or several grades is more than twice that

among students who haven't stayed back. The connection between grade promotion and school leaving begins as early as kindergarten or the first grade.

Consider just one example. A recent study in Boston links reduction in the minimal school age for kindergarten enrollment to increases in Grade 1 retentions.[2] Teachers also complain that students entering first grade, without at least kindergarten experience, are poorly prepared, more often have undiagnosed learning disabilities, and miss school more often than other children.

The research reviewed shows that keeping students back a grade in primary school makes less sense than providing the special services the student needs to perform at grade level. Holding students back is also expensive, over $4,000 per extra year of school.

Still, too few state policymakers have recognized that children and youth problems must be addressed in a developmental and coordinated fashion. Next year in Georgia, every third grader will have to pass a state test to advance to grade four. Such a policy already exists in Florida, while variations of the approach operate in North Carolina and Louisiana. In the words of one editorial, "Is retention without remediation punishment?"

Opportunities for Improvement

Many primary schools have recognized the importance of changing grade promotion policies. They are reorganizing their classes into multi-age groupings. With students of different ages in these classes, special attention may be devoted to problem youth without the stigma of overage. Other schools allow students to make up unsatisfactory performance throughout the school year rather than notifying a flunking student the last week of the term, when it is often too late. Finally, some large schools promote biannually, so repeaters make up only a semester rather than an entire year.

Direct and consistent approaches in the early grades can go a long way toward reducing the negative effects of grade retention in primary schools, and ultimately, toward reducing the sense of defeat and conspicuous failure that foreshadow the decision to drop out.

Responding to the Child's Entire Life

As has been emphasized repeatedly, many social and economic impediments undermine the development of poor children. The

first step for elementary schools is to develop a comprehensive assessment of each child's social and economic condition outside of school. This will involve extensive consultation with parents, periodic home visits, and joint planning with parent groups, community organizations, and youth-serving agencies.

Educators are understandably reluctant to assume the responsibilities of social workers and health care providers. However, in inner-city and poor rural communities, where environmental problems sabotage a child's development and progress, the schools have no choice but to provide leadership in identifying these problems and acting as catalytic institutions to resolve them. In this process, however, teachers must make a discerning effort to involve and engage parents in their youngsters' education and development.

An extensive body of research shows that nutritional and health services and a supportive home environment are important elements in achieving academic success. These basic needs can be particularly important in the pre-school period. The results from longitudinal research on pre-school care and education programs for low-income children show impressive gains for participants, resulting in higher rates of high school graduation and college attendance. One citizen's task force in Minneapolis found that for every $1.00 spent on early childhood development programs, such as Head Start, $4.00 to $7.00 is saved in later costs for remedial education, court services, and welfare payments.[3]

Opportunities for Improvement

A few states have recognized the importance of integrating education with comprehensive services for young children. While Minnesota maintains a Council on Children, Youth, and Families, the states of Missouri, South Carolina, New York and Texas provide reimbursement to local school districts that run effective parent education classes, early detection screening, and remedial programs for high risk 1-to-4 year olds. New York has also experimented with comprehensive pre-kindergarten intervention programs for low-income parents and children. **The wisdom of these approaches should not be ignored by other states. The "pay now or pay later" choice is justified on both social and economic grounds.** This has been strongly demonstrated in the research conducted by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation.[4]

Identifying the At-Risk Child

Is the child falling behind his or her grade level? Is the child's ability to learn impeded by poor vision and poor hearing? Does the child lack a quiet, secure place to complete homework assignments?

These are issues that will affect the future educational development of at-risk children. *Elementary schools should discontinue the current reliance on aggregate statistical indicators and concentrate instead on the educational progress and overall welfare of the individual child.*

Opportunities for Improvement

A special unit should be established within elementary schools with the responsibility to identify early warnings of school failure. A case management approach should be instituted that mobilizes resources and develops intervention strategies at the first sign that a child may be encountering serious difficulties. One obvious signal is when a child is overage for grade, or falls behind his or her grade level in academic achievement.

A critical function of a risk-detection system is tracking individual students as they progress from one level of the school system to another. As was emphasized previously, a significant number of students drop out—"disappear"—as they move from elementary school to junior high and then to high school. At present, schools have no system to find out what happens to the child who leaves. A second element is to organize education so that students keep the same teachers through, for example, the 7th and 8th grades, so they have more of a family-type atmosphere. This practice has been tried in Toledo, Ohio and other districts with success.

Maintaining communication between counselors, teachers and administrators at every level of the system is important for following the performance and enrollment status of at-risk youngsters. This also involves establishing links with programs and institutions that serve out-of-school youths.

Management information systems, which link the three levels of school as well as programs in the out-of-school environment, are not "pie in the sky" niceties. They are essential elements of a comprehensive dropout prevention strategy.

High School

A review of the research leads to one major conclusion: an effective dropout prevention program at the high school level cannot be based on one single element, such as remedial instruction or the provision of social services. To succeed, dropout prevention for older youth requires a cohesive, integrated effort that combines the following components, and perhaps others, depending on the particular needs of the students in the individual school:

- mentorship and intensive, sustained counseling directed toward the troubled youngster;
- an array of social services, including health care, family planning education, and infant care facilities for the adolescent mother;
- concentrated remediation using individualized instruction and competency-based curricula;
- an effective school-business collaboration that provides ongoing access to the mainstream economy;
- improved incentives;
- year-round schools;
- heightened accountability for dropouts at all levels of the public education system—schools, school districts and states;
- involvement of parents and community organizations in dropout prevention.

The following discussion considers each of these components and suggests promising strategies to implement them.

Counseling and Mentorship

The damage stemming from inadequate guidance counseling is enormous. Students who do not receive adequate counseling lose an "early warning system," miss out on an opportunity to engage their parents in their education and forfeit valuable assistance in developing post-high school options. The professional counseling field as a whole loses as well, because high school counselors are not able to make proper referrals to the network of out-of-school programs serving high-risk youth. The crisis in counseling, with its spiraling counselor/student ratios (now 1:700 in some urban districts), calls for drastic responses. The need for improving counselor training and restructuring counseling programs is the subject of a recent report of The College Board's Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling.[5] The deficiencies in the truant

officer system are equally grave. In Chicago, for example, only 171 truant officers serve a student population of 431,000!

Opportunities for Improvement

Limited responses to this dilemma have included hundreds, if not thousands, of small-scale initiatives in local communities. **A more ambitious idea should be tested—such as an attempt to register, on a voluntary basis, all high-risk youth in a state in a new Educational Services Corporation.** This Corporation would be a public, non-profit organization providing the following services: extensive outreach and marketing; design of education and employment development plans for each registrant; periodic testing and assessment using state of the art tools; and implementation of case management, follow-up, and advocacy for high-risk youth.

The truancy office should be reconsidered and restructured to stimulate greater linkage between schools, students' homes, and the community. In the new system, truant officers should serve as "case managers" for high-risk youth and would, beyond simple enforcement of the law, provide expert sources of referrals. The number of truant officers must be increased and their training improved. Research, demonstrations, and policy studies are all necessary to bring truancy work in line with today's realities.

Social Services and Teenage Pregnancy Prevention

Previously, the crisis arising from the alarming increase in adolescent pregnancy was described. While there is no single panacea for teen pregnancy, a two-pronged strategy is needed which will help prevent pregnancy and also improve the prospects for adolescent mothers resuming their high school education.

School-based health clinics provide comprehensive medical services to teens at the place where they are most likely to be. While the clinics furnish services ranging from mental health counseling to athletic physicals, they are also uniquely suited to provide family planning information, services, and referrals to teens who might not seek them elsewhere. Over 80 clinics now operate in cities across the country.

Emerging research attests to the success of pilot school-based clinics in reducing teen pregnancies.[6] Although a small but vocal number of traditionally minded groups have opposed the provision of family planning services in the schools, most parents have supported the clinics once informed of clinic goals and procedures.

No amount of data, however, has reversed the stance of more ideological opponents and, when they prevail, the schools and students lose an effective weapon.

For most poor teenagers, it has been very difficult to combine motherhood with continuing their education. With the scarcity of child care facilities in their communities, teen mothers feel they have no choice but to stay at home and take care of their children. However, in a number of cities, infant-care centers have been established within high schools. While young mothers attend classes, their children are cared for by trained professionals. Mothers may look through the window of the center, checking on their infants as they go from class to class. The centers also provide nutritional and child-rearing counseling that is invaluable to these young mothers. In such cities as Minneapolis and Houston, infant-care school-based centers have been effective in reducing dropout rates.

School-based health centers and infant care centers should be established on a much wider basis in disadvantaged communities throughout the United States.

Yet, many other social services are required to assist youngsters beset by so many hurdles. One strategy for providing these vital services is an approach first adopted by the Cities-in-Schools (CIS) program. Cities-in-Schools is an eight-city network of locally initiated dropout prevention programs. These efforts which historically have been both school-based and externally-based programs offer tutoring, recreational services, legal and social services. Social service professionals are encouraged to work with teachers to assist at-risk youth, providing outreach to students' families and offering counseling and referral.

Interviews for this study suggest that many program operators and experts believe that the approach CIS advocates makes great intuitive sense but the research has indicated that the model has not been fully implemented successfully in many places and that, as exemplified in the Atlanta CIS network, CIS operates more frequently in alternative community-based school sites.[7]

Opportunities for Improvement

One solution to the implementation problem of the CIS approach may be for community-based organizations (rather than government organizations) to work in neighborhood schools on dropout prevention. In ten New York City high schools, for example, schools are assigned a four member team of social workers, employment coun-

selors, substance abuse specialists, and literacy instructors from community groups. Each student is assigned a case manager who serves as an ombudsman and broker for needed services.

Remediation

Research demonstrates that a remediation approach combining traditional paper and pencil materials as well as state-of-the-art computer-assisted instruction, can be very effective in improving academic performance as well as generating an overall sense of competency among at-risk students.

Computers can help to individualize instruction in an "open entry/open exit"competency-based classroom. These approaches provide teachers with instant recordkeeping and also introduce accountability through the feedback mechanism of mastery tests. The research is quite clear: Dropouts relate very well to the use of this approach, considerably better than they relate to general "computer literacy."[8]

It should also be recognized that technology alone does not overcome the crisis of competency. Technology needs to be utilized in a format that develops a full range of skills at a pace maintained by the individual student.

Opportunities for Improvement

The Comprehensive Competency Program (CCP) of the Washington, D.C.-based Remediation and Training Institute, has proven particularly effective. Started with Ford Foundation funds, CCP was intended to package and refine the best available educational technologies developed in Job Corps, and numerous other public and private efforts. Today, there are 140 learning centers nationwide authorized to use CCP. About one third of the 70,000 CCP participants are dropouts, another third are in-school youth, and the remainder are graduates.

The project makes available to public schools, and other institutions, a full "turnkey" learning center or its components. Trainees in these centers work at their own speed on: (a) academic skills; (b) "functional competencies" (such as reading want-ads or calculating overtime); and (c) pre-employment skills (such as job seeking). They also practice skills necessary for the GED, obtaining a job, or continuing their education. Early evaluations of this self-paced, individualized, and competency-based approach have shown significant improvement in reading ability.[9]

Remediation intervention strategies, as exemplified by CCP, should be widely implemented in both school and non-school community settings.

Fulltime Schools

In 1979 and 1980 some 3,000 Atlanta students took the standardized Metropolitan Achievement Test before and after their summer vacations for two years in a row. The results show that the summer break had a negative effect on year-to-year learning among the poorer teenagers, while the more privileged youngsters did better when they returned to school. Some researchers have estimated that 80 percent of the difference in year-to-year learning between affluent and poor youngsters originates during the summer.[10] To put the issue starkly, more affluent youngsters attend camps that provide educational enrichment, visit museums, go to concerts, have parental encouragement/demands for summer reading and may travel widely with their families in the United States and abroad. Poor youngsters often hang out on the streets of their ravaged neighborhoods. Of course, poor kids also work full or part-time during their summer vacations—that is, if they can get a job.

For many youngsters, a warm school building provides a refuge of last resort from what can become pretty "mean streets." The school may be the only place where they can shoot a basket or have a "bull session" free of drugs and alcohol, sexual pressures, fights or crime. In inner-city neighborhoods, keeping the school building open during the afternoons and evenings and on weekends, could have two positive results: instead of being perceived, as it too often is, as an isolated, besieged garrison, the school would be seen as a concerned community institution; students, who now view their schools as punitive lock-ups, might begin to view them as caring, engaged and supportive institutions.

Opportunities for Improvement

The new Summer Training and Education Program (STEP) of Public/Private Ventures takes in-school youth, ages 14 and 15, who are at risk of dropping out, and provides paid summer jobs, 90 hours of intensive competency-based academic skills remediation, and (to combat teen pregnancy) family/life skills planning. Preliminary evaluation results are modest, but consistent with a series of earlier studies that showed that enriching

summer job programs can slow reading and math losses of students.[11]

Another initiative, The Bridge Project, is designed to keep disadvantaged ninth and tenth graders in school.[12] The project offers remedial education classes, actual work experience, and classroom preparation for the work world. These components are designed to be offered sequentially, beginning in the ninth grade and then extending through the summer, tenth grade, and the following summer. **Although there is no hard evidence yet, the middle school years model operating year round is emerging as a very promising strategy for dropout prevention.**

In some cities, school systems are beginning to provide year-round instruction. Last year in Houston, for example, the school district operated 11 year-round elementary schools and studied the feasibility of starting full-time year-round high schools. But, as school officials there emphasize, this will require support from foundations and the corporate sector. **Full-time, year-round schools and enriched summer programs which include literacy services are a promising investment for corporations and philanthropies that are concerned about the dropout problem.**

Parents' Involvement and School Justice

One leader of a parents' group in the Midwest has said, "Many people feel that if you ask the schools questions, even innocent ones, your child will pay for it. As citizens and parents, we can raise funds, sell candy and bake cakes. Do not, however, attempt to undermine the system. Please do not mention rights. Don't dare say advocacy, and, above all, no questions about finances."[13]

Most potential dropouts are not "waifs;" they live with one or two parents. Teachers and youth workers have often testified that the "toughest kids" become quite compliant when a parent is involved in addressing an educational or disciplinary problem. No further research is needed to drive home the point that parental involvement in attendance, homework, and discipline is a crucial part of educating young people.

But, involvement is a two-way street. If parents are to be involved in the effort to prevent their children from dropping out, they must also be involved when schools decide to punish their youngsters with detention, expulsion and suspension. Now, many parents are informed only *after the fact* when their children are punished. And since these punishments disproportionately affect minority chil-

dren, many black and Hispanic parents feel the schools are shutting them out.

Schools must adhere to a code of discipline that requires consultation with parents before punishment is imposed. Their views should be solicited on the appropriate penalties for "disruptive" behavior. Parents should be permitted to describe such mitigating conditions as family discord, debilitating poverty and substance abuse at home—all of which may account for (but not condone) disruptive behavior in schools. It is not sufficient to give the appearance of justice in the schools. Students must come to believe that schools practice fair and equal treatment—and that requires the involvement of parents.

Opportunities for Improvement

For more than 20 years, educators have debated the value of giving parents a policymaking role in schools. But no clear consensus or research has emerged on how parents can be involved substantively.

Creative ideas are needed about how schools can spark and sustain parental involvement. Parents of potential dropouts are often themselves burdened with social and economic problems. What mechanisms exist for stimulating their involvement in the schools? Financial incentives? Classroom style education? Letters from the Mayor and Superintendent? Mandatory parental involvement in federal programs, such as Chapter I?

It is critical that each school work out its own strategy for involving parents. But, the parental involvement issue is often dropped to the bottom of the list when a dropout prevention strategy is being designed. It is a high-priority concern deserving serious and sustained attention. **Parents should be involved with the schools in developing effective parental involvement programs.**

School-Business Collaborations

The guiding principle of these partnerships as they focus on at-risk issues is prevention. Rather than waiting until youth drop out, partnerships seek to help at-risk youth to develop the necessary skills to stay in school and become productive members of society. The fundamental principle behind the partnership approach is that helping poor youth make the transition from school to work is the responsibility of the community as a whole.

The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and the AEtna Foundation have led in the formation of at least two dozen partnership projects and inspired many similar programs throughout the nation. A notable local effort is The Boston COMPACT, a high-level agreement between leading Boston employers, colleges, social service agencies and the public schools. Since the signing of the original agreement, student attendance in Boston has increased by 10 percent, reading and math scores have gone up, and the business community has been able to provide more summer jobs than previously. A significant element in the business-school collaboration was support provided by high school-based teams of job developers and educators working together on a common mission.

In other communities, however, the willingness of business and schools to join together has not been enough to make the partnerships work. Without money, coordination, leadership, and sustained commitment at the highest level in both the business and education communities, partnerships have floundered.

Opportunities for Improvement

Building on the successful COMPACT model, the leadership of Boston, including the mayor, school committee, superintendent of schools, business executives, university presidents, and community representatives, has forged a new alliance to reduce dropout rates and increase re-entry of students. The new effort is characterized by numerical goals: to reduce the number of students who drop out annually by one-half (from 3,000 to 1,500) and to double the number of youngsters who return to regular or alternative education (from 500 to 1,000 per year).

A review of the research on collaborative efforts in other cities indicates that the distinctive feature of effective partnerships is that each party agrees to meet certain performance standards.[14] For example, schools agree to increase student retention by a certain level; business leaders agree to fund so many slots in alternative high schools; the city agrees to fund special remediation programs, and students agree to meet attendance and academic standards.

Numerical goals are absolutely essential to avoid empty partnerships. The numbers "drive" the process by encouraging coalition members to focus on actual service delivery. Numerical goals may

also serve as a community rallying point in a campaign to combat dropout rates.

Improved Incentives to Stay in School

Educators around the country are rediscovering the importance of a simple fact: students will not stay in school unless they are motivated to do so. Two broad types of incentives show promise in promoting heightened motivation to stay in school: financial incentives and less tangible forms of incentives such as providing emotional support through pairing potential dropouts with caring adults.

A new red car, designer watches, radios and cameras — these are some of the prizes that DuSable High School students in Chicago won for staying in school. Local Chicago business leaders "adopt-a-kid" by investing $10 per week for the student as long he or she maintains good attendance and grades. And in Des Moines, Iowa the "carrot" begins earlier; Grandview College has promised 5th graders up to $1200 toward tuition if they finish high school.

In Dallas, enough money has been raised to partially support all 6th graders in six schools who choose to complete their education and go on to college. Another example is the recently announced ACCESS plan - a 5 million dollar fund established by business and foundation leaders in Boston to cover the "last dollar" tuition costs of any Boston public high school graduate accepted by a college.

Many of these initiatives were inspired by the New York City "I've Got A Dream Foundation." Philanthropist, Eugene Lang's "gang," as the "60 Minutes" television show called them, had a retention rate of over 90 percent after businessman Eugene Lang promised to put aside $2,000 each for an entire class of 6th graders who successfully completed high school. Fifty of the original 61 students are still in school and expect to graduate.

For Lang's 6th graders the financial incentive was actually only part of the winning package; the staff of Dorothy Stoneman's Harlem Youth Action Corps provided intensive support services, follow-up, and mentoring throughout the program. Mentoring is also a central ingredient in a 24 city dropout prevention program, Career Beginnings sponsored by the Commonwealth Fund, the John and Catherine MacArthur Foundation, the Gannett Foundation, and numerous local foundations and government agencies.

Career Beginnings pairs each youngster with an adult mentor. The program provides a year-long array of employment and classroom training activities focusing on school completion and post-high school plans. Mentors function as advocates for the students, serving as the "glue" in this particular approach to dropout prevention.

Opportunities for Improvement

A wide variety of programs has been initiated that provide innovative forms of financial and intangible incentives for students to stay in school. Despite the promise that they show, they do not appear amenable to the standard approaches to educational reform: documenting a model and inducing people in other school systems to replicate the model. The strengths of these innovative approaches lie in the excitement that comes from home grown solutions to local problems. Opportunities for reform lie in the direction of stimulating local educators to think along general lines and to develop approaches that make sense in their own communities. This does not exclude, of course, technical assistance and support from national groups. Philanthropists, for example, should be introduced to the *idea* of an "I've Got A Dream Foundation," but encouraged to come up with their own version.

A review of these efforts does not lead to recommendations for federal involvement or a "cookie cutter" approach to replication. Behind most successful financial incentive and mentor programs is a strong program staff. The media have often portrayed these programs as simple promises of money or personal relationships. But behind the promises are caring and competent adult staff arranging the mentorships, explaining the tuition assistance and so on. **The importance must be stressed of properly pairing business leaders to program staff, and of supporting the community groups which are the backbone of these "private sector" initiatives.**

School Accountability and Local Governance

The cornerstone of education reform must be the individual schools. Where others speculate about what is needed, school-based professionals bear the responsibility of settling on a plan of action and delivering services.

If school teams become the source of genuine governance, they must be held accountable for outcomes. Assuming adequate resources (a significant assumption), the state should set minimum

standards of retaining students and should relax regulations when the dropout rate is reduced.

The state has another responsibility—to reevaluate and to enforce existing regulations and laws. Many students who leave school before graduation or before attaining the age of 16 (18 in some states) violate state compulsory education laws. If the dropouts work, they may breach child labor laws that require school attendance. Parents who are indifferent to these violations can be prosecuted in some states.

Due to financial constraints and custom, these laws are unevenly enforced in practice. Some evidence even suggests that when the rules are enforced, it is for selective cases, and more often than not, to keep certain individuals out of, rather than in, school.

Opportunities for Improvement

First, state laws cannot be enforced unless each secondary school reports uniformly and accurately its number of dropouts according to their reason for leaving.

Second, average daily membership or attendance (ADM/ADA) must be better administered, with a rational policy for counting persons. What excuses for absences, for example, count for ADM reimbursement? What period of the school day counts for attendance? Who pays for truant officers? Is there a financial incentive for schools that work hard to reduce truancy?

Specific numerical performance standards for school attendance and school leaving are critical elements of a dropout prevention strategy. Whatever the chosen goals, school teams should be given wide discretion as well as adequate resources to devise appropriate responses to meet these standards.

With resources, discretion and school-based control, also comes responsibility. **If individual schools prove incapable of self-evaluation and if they cannot retain their students, then local boards of education and state education officials must be prepared to intervene.** To survive, bankrupt businesses must reorganize, establish new goals, and replace failed leadership with a new executive team. Similarly, teachers and administrators who accept student failure as a given—and even attempt to conceal it with bogus statistics—must be replaced. Admittedly, this is a harsh remedy, but if we are serious about educating our forgotten youngsters, there is no alternative.

School-based governance would increase, not diminish, the importance of technical assistance provided by school systems, state agencies, and the federal government. Consider the case of New York's 1984 law appropriating special funds to decrease dropout rates and increase school attendance.

New York provided a combination of state and local funds totaling over $30 million to 130 New York City schools in the 1985-86 school year. The funds were carefully targeted to chronic truants; the programs at both the middle and high school level involved community groups, and most of the critical decisions were made by school teams.

However, monitoring of the program in New York City during the first two years revealed many administrative and implementation problems.[15] To cite but one example, students in middle schools received special services but had to leave their regular classrooms to participate.

Such problems demonstrate that school site governance, without tangible management and technical assistance from school district, city, state, and federal programs, does not assure success. Schools need sufficient resources (in New York City the researchers discovered it was $1,700 per youngster); summer planning "institutes;" ongoing staff development; assistance developing management information systems (MIS), and other forms of support to make school-based governance work.

One essential resource is leadership. New York City has an Assistant Superintendent for Dropout Prevention, and other cities are following this lead. **A professional position is necessary for coordinating the many dimensions of the delivery system and for cutting through bureaucratic redtape.** Such a position will also signal to the public and school system staff that youngsters at risk of dropping out are an important group. School systems cannot rest with establishment of such a position. Great care must be taken in selecting leadership for dropout prevention. These persons need to be innovative and non-bureaucratic, and need to have exemplary people skills and strong internal and external networks. **The school system must create a policy and regulatory climate in which initiatives can succeed to improve school completion.**

Consideration should also be given to state-initiated local coordinating "clusters." The cluster would be comprised of representatives from the various community agencies and schools serving

"high-risk" youth. Each local cluster would recommend policy and procedural reform that affects dropouts, and each cluster might even review actual cases. Difficult cases would be referred by the local clusters to an organization such as the Educational Services Corporation suggested elsewhere in this report.

Summary

In these pages, a number of recommendations have been advanced, ranging from provision of social services to more parental involvement to increased accountability—all directed toward the goal of reducing the number of dropouts. Various opportunities have also been discussed for reform of troubled schools. It is clear that reform will require a long-term commitment of resources at every level of the school system, the dedication of teachers and administrators, the concern of city and state school officials, the active involvement of outside youth-serving agencies and institutions, and of the business community.

Endnotes

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7. Robert E. Stake, "Quieting Reform: A Detailed Look at Social Scientists and Government Officials Evaluating Cities-InSchools," (University of Illinois, Chicago: 1983).
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11. Alvia Y. Branch et.al, *Summer Training and Education Program (STEP): Report on the 1985 Summer Experience*, (Public/Private Ventures, Philadelphia: April, 1986).
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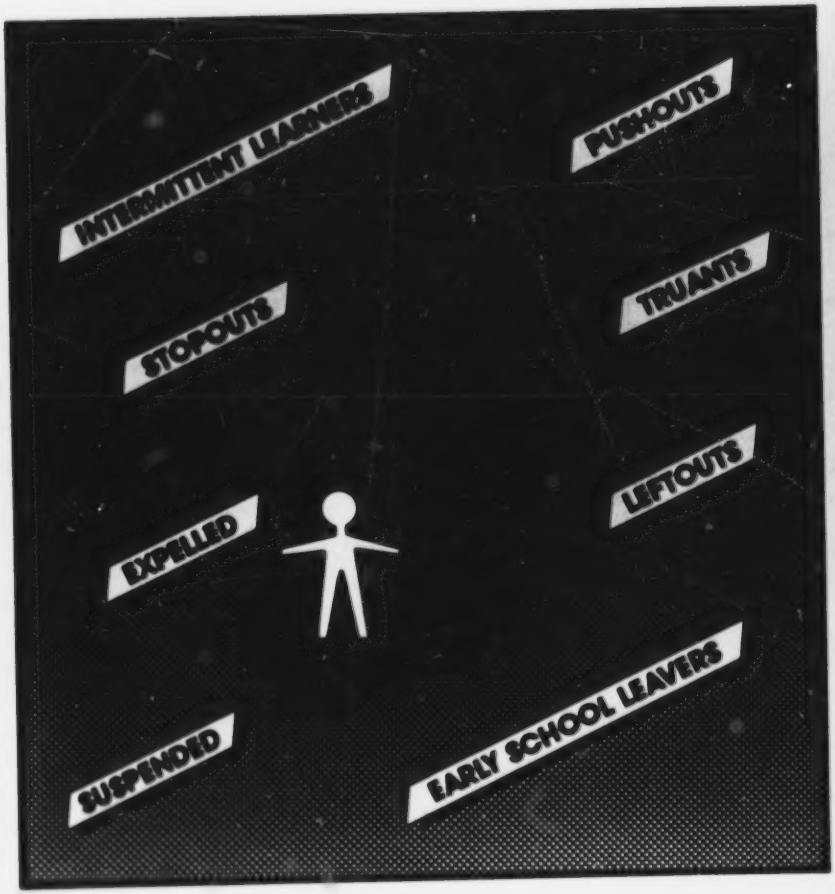
ON THE OUTSIDE


INTERMITTENT LEARNERS
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EXPELLED
LEFTOUTS
SUSPENDED
EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

Chapter Four

ON THE OUTSIDE

It would be a grave oversight if the discussion of the dropout problem was limited to strategies for students still in school. With millions of school-age males and females now out of school, without a job or a diploma, it is imperative to describe briefly their condition and prospects for continuing their education. To forget them because their names no longer appear on a school's attendance roster, would be to engage in an act of monumental indifference. And yet, this is what dropout strategy is in most school districts — some prevention programs but few services for young people outside the schools.

There is no archetypal dropout.

Some school leavers have performed close to their grade level. Others have fallen far behind. Some can read; others cannot. Some come from families where parents are earning decent wages; others have grown up on public assistance. Some are pregnant or are already parents; others do not have children.

For planners and analysts, these differences in adolescent experience are very significant. No single strategy of remediation and training can serve the entire heterogeneous dropout population. Therefore, reason would dictate a rehabilitative strategy responsive to the different needs, abilities and motivations of the diverse groups within the dropout population.

But it is hard to target services to different groups of dropouts because so little is known about what has happened to them after they left school. Six months after a student has departed, no one at the school knows, or has the responsibility for knowing, what has happened to the youngster on the streets—whether the teenager has enrolled in another school, taken a job, is raising a child or has landed in jail. In Chicago, for example, some school officials estimated that as many as 25 percent of elementary school graduates never even show up at high school. One district superinten-

dent in a predominately Hispanic community says, "In this district one out of every five kids who graduates from elementary school gets lost." And he adds, "in this district we have ten attendance (truant) officers for 23,000 youngsters."[1]

Broad conclusions that can be drawn from research findings concerning dropouts are somewhat speculative, relying only on data from those youths who have re-established ties to educational and training systems. Little is known about youths who are unconnected, who are out there alone and forgotten.

With that qualification, there are several central questions to address. Which youths are most likely to continue their education? Which youths benefit from "second-chance" programs? How do minority youngsters fare in these programs compared to white dropouts? What are the employment prospects for minority and white dropouts? The discussion is concluded by drawing a rough distinction between two segments of the dropout population. One is designated "accessible" youth; the other, "estranged" youth.

Re-entering School

The *High School and Beyond* survey shows that about half the sophomores who left school ultimately returned or were in General Equivalency Diploma classes 3 or 4 years later. In California, a legislative study found that 39 percent of the 1983 dropouts furthered their education one year later by receiving a GED or entering a trade or community college program.[2]

Among dropouts, white students are most likely to return to high school, followed by black and Hispanic students.[3] The surveys also show that return to school rates are consistently associated with test scores. Sum (1986) reports that dropouts with test scores in the middle to top of the test score distribution of dropouts are two to three times more likely to return to school than those who score lowest on ability tests. This association is particularly true for ethnic minorities—the majority of high scoring black and Hispanic dropouts return to school, while less than 23 percent of the low scoring minority dropouts return to high school.[4] In fact, minority youth with high test scores are more likely to return and complete high school than their white counterparts. The dropout problem is not a permanent condition for a sizable group of youth on the outside.

The High School Diploma vs. the General Equivalency Diploma (GED)

The proportion of 17-and-18 year olds taking the GED test has increased over the past decade, showing that the test has become more widely known and accepted as an alternative to high school completion.

In 1981, 711,000 people took the GED with 72 percent passing. Slightly under one third of the GED test takers were 19 years or younger. These were generally the most employable of the young school leavers since the major reason for pursuing the GED was "job-related."

Yet, a disturbing implication is associated with this trend. A recent Wisconsin study found that many GED takers pass the test with only a 6th grade reading level, and only about 8 percent of GED's who go on to college ever complete two years of study.[5]

In some states, enthusiasm for the low-cost GED has led to mandates for its use in statewide welfare reform. Researchers will need to consider whether GED recipients will be at a major disadvantage in the increasingly competitive job market. With an increasing emphasis on educational credentials, will GED holders be the last to be hired and the first to be fired? Does the GED mask serious deficiencies in reading, writing and computing? Are minority and female dropouts pressured to go the GED route, while incentives are offered to white male dropouts to return to a conventional school that confers a traditional diploma?

The next decade of educational reform must address tough questions about the proliferation and education quality of alternative degrees.

Alternative School Programs

Hundreds of secondary level alternative schools throughout the United States offer the potential or actual dropout a last opportunity to continue or resume education. Eileen Foley found that in New York City's alternative school system, truant youths and/or students with poor academic and behavior records improved their attendance by almost 40 percent over earlier patterns; they also achieved 60 percent more school credits than they had in their former schools. These gains held up over time, but only for some participants.

Sadly, one in four of the New York City youth in alternative schools dropped out of these "last chance" institutions, and an

additional 20 percent were so overage for their grade that it was unlikely they could achieve enough credits to graduate by age 21. Foley's most important finding was: alternative schools attracting the most dropout prone youth were found to have the highest rates of alternative school leaving.[6]

Alternative schools work well for the highly motivated former dropout, but not so well for others.

Luring Dropouts Back To School With Jobs

For many years, researchers have discussed whether the inducement of a part-time job will draw dropouts back to school and encourage them to continue until they graduate.

A 218 million dollar experiment, serving 76,000 disadvantaged youth in 17 cities between 1977 and 1981, found that by age 19, only half of the participants had graduated from high school, while almost 40 percent had dropped out.[7] These disappointing results were achieved in projects which *guaranteed* minimum wage part-time jobs to students who agreed to stay in school.

These youths, some of whom were parents, obviously required more than after-school jobs. Many were several grade levels behind in reading and math. They especially did not wish to return to traditional learning environments. In fact, almost 80 percent of the small number of returning dropouts chose alternative education and GED classes rather than regular classrooms. Among those who went back to traditional classrooms, about 40 percent left school again, becoming in effect "double dropouts."

Research findings on the role of jobs in drawing dropouts back to school thus far are not promising.

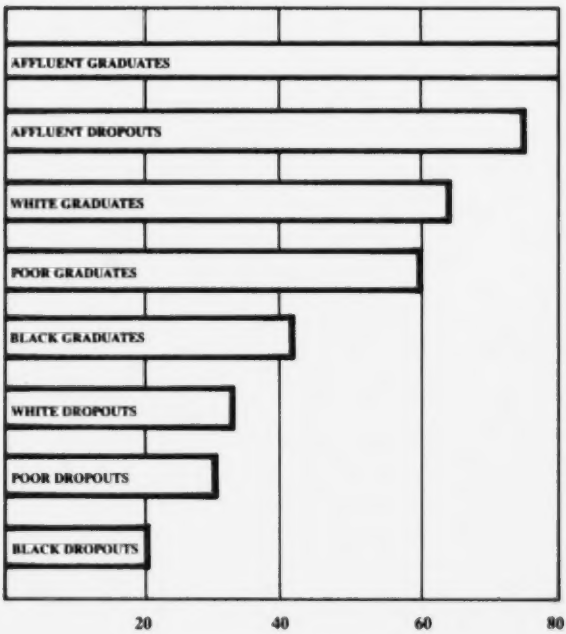
Employment Prospects "On the Outside"

Earlier we discussed the unrealistic expectations about work that many at-risk students hold. For minorities and low income women the prospects are especially grim. Most cannot rely on a network of friends and relatives to gain access to a job that offers potential for the future. Unlike school leavers of twenty or thirty years ago, they lack both advocates and mentors. Consider the following data:

- One in four 16-24 year old dropouts were unemployed in 1985 compared to one in ten high school graduates (who were not enrolled in post-secondary education or training).

- The unemployment rate for female dropouts in 1985 was 30 percent, three times higher than the 11 percent unemployment rate for female graduates.
- Dropouts are more than twice as likely not to seek work. The proportion of 16-24 year old dropouts in 1985 who were not in the labor force was 32 percent compared to 13 percent among high school graduates (not enrolled in post-secondary education or training).
- Minority dropouts have higher non-participation rates and unemployment rates than white dropouts. The employment situation for black dropouts is worse now, relative to whites, than 20 years ago.
- There is a labor market "queue:" Economist Andrew Sum documented the following labor market line up in March, 1985.[8]

YOUTH LABOR MARKET LINE UP



Studies show that the jobs dropouts find offer less challenge and few opportunities for growth. About 8 percent of employed male dropouts age 16-24 were higher skilled workers in 1985, compared to 20 percent among male high school graduates. Similar patterns persist for females. Two out of three recent dropouts work at jobs that pay only the minimum wage.

- The advantage of a high school degree has doubled since the 1960s. For example, between 1965-1969, high school graduates, not enrolled in post-secondary education or training, were 30 percent more likely to be employed than dropouts. By 1983, the gap had widened to 61 percent.[9]

The hard facts and figures demonstrate just how difficult it is for the uncredentialed, unconnected dropout to gain a toehold in today's job market.

Job Prospects in the Future

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of 20 to 24 year olds in the labor force will drop from the 1984 level of 24 million to 21 million by 1990 and 20 million by 1995. By the year 2000, the number of young people in the workforce will be the same as it was in 1973, yet the economy will be at least twice as large. As a consequence, employers will compete aggressively with the military, community and four-year colleges for young people.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that most growth in occupational employment will be in high level service occupations. Today's and tomorrow's jobs require workers who can think and learn. High school dropouts are often the last group considered for such positions; employers more often look to older workers, welfare mothers, and high school graduates. As the labor force acquires more schooling, the employment prospects for those at the bottom worsen.

Is this shrinking youth cohort good news for dropouts? Generally yes, but the "youth dearth" may not help the school dropout if he/she does not possess the skills employers seek. Many of the new jobs in the economy originate in companies that are service oriented or utilize high technology. These companies often require skills that dropouts do not possess and are frequently in places where dropouts do not live.

The Dropout and "Second Chance" Programs

Many educators, along with much of the public, believe that when dropouts quit school they are offered a great selection of work experience, remediation, and skill training programs.

Under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), young dropouts comprised well under 20 percent of most youth program participants and, today, under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), the share of dropouts in youth programs has declined further.

In part, the relatively small number of participants in "second chance" programs is attributable to a "creaming" process. Programs elevate their "success" rate by enrolling the most promising youngsters. It also costs less to train them. A program director in the Southwest observed, "If we really wanted to serve hard-core unemployed youth, we'd have to do a lot more than we've been willing to do. You wouldn't be looking for a payoff in less than three years, possibly four years. A reasonably stable nineteen-twenty-year-old with some work experience, we can brush him up and send him out on a job. But the others? We don't want to make the investment, so we forget about them."[10]

Although the actual number of dropouts enrolled in the "second chance" system has been limited, some of the programs have proved effective in raising the employability of participants. But how? What services and combination of services work best for dropouts? We will address these questions in Chapter V of this report.

Yet, the fact is that young dropouts have never been major participants in the nation's "second chance" system—programs that offer a combination of remediation, development of basic skills, and assistance in finding jobs.

Two Groups of Dropouts: "Accessible" and "Estranged" Youths

Youngsters who can read and write, who have not spent a lot of time on the streets, who are motivated to seek help and who have not been in trouble with the law—these are the "accessible" youngsters. They are most likely on their own to tap into and profit from alternative education and "second chance" programs.

But there are other youths on the outside. They are poor, often minority young persons, who have fallen very far behind in school. Failures in school and outside, the more time they spend on the

streets the more alienated they become from the institutions that offer the promise of status and economic self-sufficiency in American life. They are the "estranged" youth.

Meet Hector. He is an "estranged" youngster. Sixteen years old, Hector rarely attended high school before he dropped out. According to attendance records, he missed over 50 school days in his last year. He was five grades behind in reading achievement. Although he has a normal I.Q., he lacks direction and doesn't understand how to look for or hold a job. With his father disabled and gone from home, Hector's mother, who speaks only Spanish, takes in sewing and relies on welfare. When he was 12 years old, Hector was sent to a youth center for 3 months after being convicted for petty theft and mugging. After dropping out, he found a job in a factory where his friends work. But he "hated" the job and quit. Hector is now unemployed, just "messing around."

Who is responsible for Hector's drift? Should society say to Hector, remake yourself, straighten up your act, then we'll talk to you about education and employment? Should counselors and teachers have intervened before Hector began his slide? What about mental health professionals? Parole officers? Job training professionals? Welfare workers? Religious leaders? His parents?

Clearly, no one institution or individual is to blame for his circumstances. But, to some extent, they all are. They are responsible because no one youth-serving institution or individual has taken the lead in coordinating and defining a response to his considerable difficulties. That is not true of troubled youngsters in other countries. In Japan, for instance, the few dropouts (less than 7 percent) are given assistance by school-based job counselors and are placed in jobs providing extensive lifelong training. In Germany, the apprenticeship system furnishes skills training and certification for students and dropouts alike.

Our fragmented social welfare system is not noted for its ability to serve youngsters like Hector. In the United States, the transition from school to work is largely a private matter. Youth are left to their own devices but are encouraged to experiment with courses of study and to try various jobs after school and in the summer. This approach works well for most youth, but leaves a sizeable minority wondering how they fit into the system.

Theoretically, Hector has the freedom to decide when and how he may resume his education or seek employment. But when the estranged dropout leaves school, he or she flounders among a

disconnected array of programs, a social "no-man's land" in which there is often neither structure or escape.

Is Hector washed up at 16 or 17? Is there no alternative for him but a life of dependency or crime? We don't believe so. Although his estrangement presents many problems to be overcome by Hector and by helping institutions, we think there is hope. But recovery and renewal cannot be achieved by one institution alone.

Genuine solutions for troubled young people (like Hector) will require linkages between the various service delivery agencies and also require some form of coordinated case management.

Endnotes

1. Lefkowitz, *Tough Change*, p. 109.
2. California Assembly, *Dropping Out, Losing Out*.
3. National Center for Educational Statistics, "Descriptive Information from High School and Beyond."
4. Sum, "Basic Skills of America's Teens."
5. "GED Not High School Equivalent, Study Finds," *Employment and Training Reporter* (Washington, D.C.: April 4, 1986). See also Berlin, Sum and Taggart's "Cutting Through" (1986). The writers suggest that once adjusting for basic skills of GED holders, the certificate has only a marginal impact on earnings.
6. Eileen M. Foley et. al., *Lessons From Alternative High Schools* and *More Lessons from Alternative High Schools*, Reports of the Public Education Association (New York: 1982, 1984).
7. These results from the Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects (YIEPP) were originally developed by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, New York, and are reported in Hahn and Lerman, *What Works in Youth Employment Policy?*
8. These and the preceding figures are from a series of unpublished analyses of the National Longitudinal Survey and Current Population Survey available from the principal author, Andrew Sum, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, 1986.
9. Andrew Sum, "Educational Attainment, Academic Ability, and the Employment and Earnings of Young Persons in the United States," (Northeastern University, Boston: 1983, updated 1984-1986).
10. Lefkowitz, *Tough Change*.

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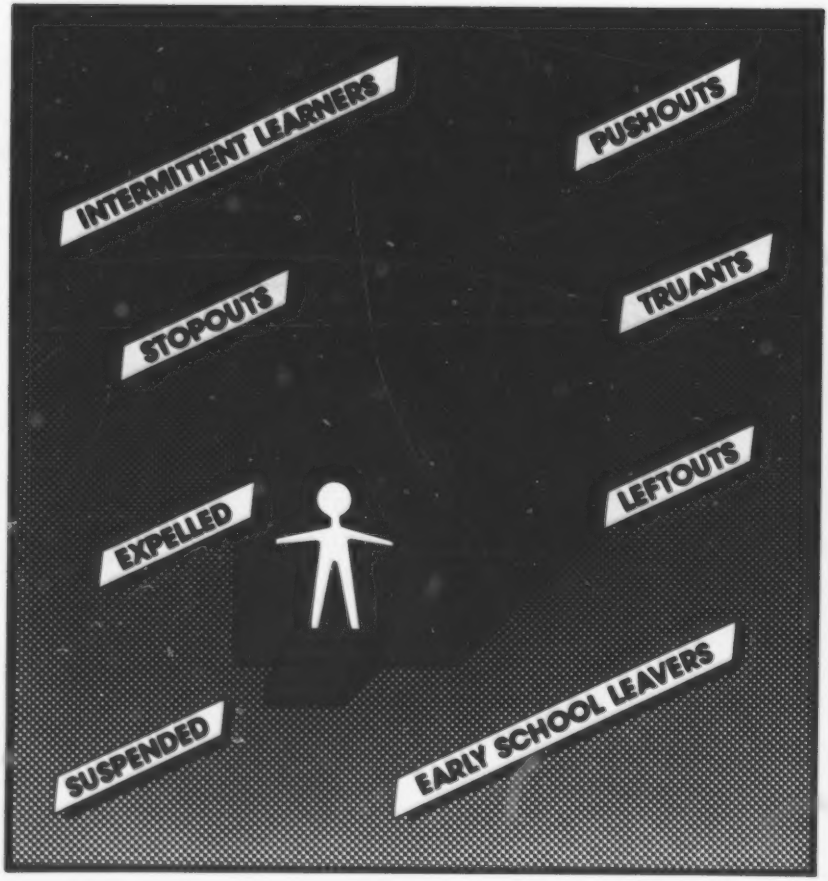
REACHING OUT TO THE DROPOUT: SECOND CHANCE PROGRAMS


INTERMITTENT LEARNERS
PUSHOUTS
STOPOUTS
TRUANTS
EXPELLED
LEFTOUTS
SUSPENDED
EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

Chapter Five

REACHING OUT TO THE DROPOUT: SECOND CHANCE PROGRAMS

How do we find dropouts once they have disappeared from the traditional school system? What can be offered "estranged" teenagers with severe problems? How can dropouts be prepared for the work world?

Admittedly, these are very difficult questions, for which there are no certain answers. But, drawing on formal research and evaluations as well as discussions with front-line youth workers, some tentative strategies and approaches are provided which hold promise for youngsters on the street.

How to Identify and Help Out-Of-School Youngsters?

As with youngsters still in school, a casework system to identify and assist dropouts is recommended. Earlier in this report, an Educational Services Corporation was proposed to voluntarily register *all* severly at-risk youth including dropouts.

Left to their own devices, only a few "estranged" dropouts join high school completion or non-degree programs. Caseworkers, aided by a massive outreach campaign, would be able to match many more high-risk youth with available programs and services. The caseworker would be paid by a formula which would guarantee long-term follow-up and longitudinal monitoring of clients until they achieved self-sufficiency. Currently, social services caseworkers in and out of schools are not trained for this kind of initiative. Special training programs, in partnership with graduate schools of social work and/or education, would be necessary.

The Educational Services Corporation (or member organization) could provide the extended outreach and one-to-one casework necessary to mend cracks in the current dropout service delivery system.

What Works Better: Jobs Alone or Jobs in Combination With Classroom Training?

This is an important question because it is a lot easier to place dropouts in jobs where employers assume the costs of training, than to set up special education and training programs. Also, during periods of high unemployment, when jobs are scarce, training appears to have little value.

Research findings from the National Supported Work Demonstration, a series of social experiments from 1976-1980, offer some answers. This program provided dropouts with peer support and structured job assignments. The idea was simple: dropouts need close supervision on the job from skilled supervisors. In response, Supported Work organizations placed skilled supervisors at job sites where dropouts were employed. As each dropout progressed on the job, he or she was gradually given more responsibility.

This combination of elements was not successful. The evaluation of Supported Work showed that young dropouts stayed in their jobs longer than they would have otherwise, but with no significant long-term impacts on their earnings, employment, criminal activity or drug abuse.[1]

Some experts believed Supported Work failed because the connection between its classroom training component and the work experience was weak. Numerous social experiments have been funded to test this very theory. The evaluation of the Alternative Youth Employment Strategies Project (AYES), which enrolled significant numbers of dropouts with criminal records, provided evidence that classroom training, combined with work experience, helped dropouts more than pure work experience.[2]

When remediation and real skills training were added to the original Supported Work model, the findings were more positive. Perhaps the program designers were on to something: connect work experience to classroom training and you will get dropouts to stay at least to the end of the program.

Do Job Skills Training and Increased Basic Skills Raise the Employability of Dropouts?

There is solid evidence that the Job Corps, the nation's largest training program for dropouts, improves the employment outcomes of participants. Those who attended Job Corps averaged 15 percent more in earnings per year than did a similar group of non-participants. There was also a higher share of participants

completing high school, going on to the military and avoiding dependency on income transfers. While studies reveal that the annual cost per participant in the Job Corps has been high (currently $9500 per year), the program's benefits exceed the cost.

Certainly, the intensity of services, the mix of remedial education and skills training, and the direct federal oversight and contracting to private management combine to produce an effective program. In addition, the participants reside away from home, making it easier for staff and participants alike to seriously engage in the challenge of upgrading skills and changing behaviors, free from distracting influences. Another contributing factor is the wealth of experience in program planning and design gained by the Job Corps during its nearly 25-year history. Throughout this period, the program has experimented with learning methods suitable for disadvantaged dropouts, including its own approach to competency-based, individualized instruction. The approach is used in many centers and has, in fact, become something of a showcase for regular school and training systems. This process of experimentation and standardization could only bear fruit in a program allowed to operate for several years.

Where are tomorrow's Job Corps? Jobstart, a new Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation project, will provide disadvantaged dropouts ages 17-21 in 11 cities with various combinations of services, including: an individualized, competency-based curriculum; skills training in occupational areas where job growth is likely; job placement and work readiness training; and, support services with counseling, mentoring, tutoring assistance, childcare, transportation, and work/maturity training.[3] While Jobstart is based on a sound model, moving the model to urban nonresidential settings may present difficulties.

Evaluations of the Job Corps show that programs which provide both job skills training and increased basic skills actually raise the employability of dropouts.[4]

Do Job Placement and Support Services Make a Difference for Young Mothers?

Project Redirection offered disadvantaged teenage mothers a variety of individualized services, including day care, work experience, skill training, basic education, personal counseling, referrals and the guidance of an adult mentor. The first year's evaluation demonstrated that twice as many previous dropouts had

returned to school one year after the program's start-up than had a comparison group of teens. Subsequent evaluations, however, were far less positive.[5] Many analysts believe that all of the right program pieces were present in Project Redirection but they were not delivered with enough intensity nor in the correct fashion. Another project, New Chance, will test whether a vigorously implemented comprehensive model can work for young mothers.[6] **The likely reasons for failures in programs that provide comprehensive placement, training and support services for young mothers lie with program implementation, not with the program model.**

How Effective is Direct Job Placement Without Skills Training?

Jobs for Youth and 70,001 LTD, two organizations providing out-of-school preemployment services, attempt to locate jobs for highly disadvantaged high school dropouts. Both programs offer career counseling, job readiness training and some remedial education to 16 to 21 year olds. Job development specialists try to convince private firms to hire participants, and in return, program staff attempt to screen young workers for the employer. In a past evaluation, over 90 percent of the evaluation sample were high school dropouts, and two-thirds were racial minorities. The average participant read at only the 6th grade level. The evaluation from the 1979-1981 period found that participants in both programs had significantly higher employment levels and wage rates than comparison groups, but these initial outcomes generally declined after about 14 months. The programs were successful and succeeded in placing disadvantaged youth into jobs quickly, as well as combining job placement with training in work maturity, preemployment skills, and limited remedial education.[7] But this success proved less enduring than that of the Job Corps, with its intensive services and residential setting.

In summary, the Jobs for Youth and 70,001 LTD programs are low-cost, short-term interventions leading to short-term but significant results.

How Can Alternative Schools Improve Educational Opportunities for Dropouts?

Eileen Foley's research regarding youth in New York City's alternative schools found that while many former dropouts and truants improved their attendance and academic performance,

almost half—the youths we call "estranged"—either dropped out or were unlikely to graduate by the age of 21 from alternative school programs. Foley's research raises this issue: how can the schools be made more responsive to that half of the dropout population most difficult to reach? Foley identified two critical elements which she believed could enable alternative schools to retain more students: the intensity of the learning environment and the concern accorded the social and emotional needs of the students. Alternative schools that both stimulated academic challenge and provided personal counseling and caring adults seem to work best. Such alternative schools share the characteristics documented in the "effective schools" literature: highly targeted services for a relatively homogeneous school population; strong principals; small school size; teachers who actively participate in counseling students as well as in management; student involvement in school governance and classroom activity; opportunities for "learning by doing;" and clear standards, rules, and regulations.

Too few school systems have alternative schools. In Oregon, an analysis of high school students placed in private alternative programs showed that only 1 in 3 school districts offered public alternative education programs, and the placements were less than 2 percent of the regular high schools' enrollment.[8]

Alternative schools are often the best available opportunity for both potential or actual dropouts, especially if the programs utilize reasonable eligibility criteria, teach real skills, and accommodate the working student. But once again, alternative schools in and of themselves are no guarantee of success for all dropouts or even the half of all dropouts who are highly motivated to complete their education.

What Have We Learned From "Second Chance" Programs?

For educators as well as training and employment staff, the most vital lesson derived from this review of "second chance" programs is the importance of integrating and relating the critical components of a comprehensive effort. Conventional education and remediation isn't effective, by itself, for the at-risk population. Isolated work experience will not reclaim impoverished and troubled youths. **What will work is a comprehensive, integrated approach in which each element is strengthened and reinforced by the other components of the program.** Specifically:

- Isolated work experience programs have little value in raising the employability of dropouts: Dropouts should work, but the experience from the worksites should be used as pedagogical reinforcement in a connected classroom component.
- Dropouts should learn, but the curriculum should relate to the "functional" capacities needed in the marketplace.
- Dropouts should acquire vocational skills, but not until they have learned to read.
- Dropouts should learn to read, but the learning environment should not resemble a traditional classroom.
- Dropouts should be teacher-taught, but each student's individuality should be reflected in the teaching methodology used.
- Dropouts should be prepared for the labor market through pre-employment/work maturity services, but not until they are genuinely ready to conduct a job search. Writing resumes and practicing job interview skills should be "exit" services and not the major thrust of dropout prevention or remediation.
- Above all, there must be an intensity of program services or, in the jargon of professional educators, there must be "time on task."

These are not revolutionary recommendations; indeed, they are part of the web of school reform described by many analysts. School administrators may argue, "but we do that already." And in fact, most school districts have programs, such as cooperative education, in which students both work and study. But field visits to schools revealed that these programs are not focused on "estranged youth." Moreover, only the most highly structured programs serving a modest number of youngters interrelate work experience and classroom training.

When "second chance" efforts are fragmented, compartmentalized and inchoate, and when there are great delays and gaps in the delivery of the training, the programs reinforce the youngster's underlying sense of incompetence. Rather than offering a "second chance," they deliver a final blow against the youth's already fragile hopes for the future.

To reclaim the most severely damaged youngsters, requires a long, costly, multidimensional response. Recovery from a tragic childhood cannot happen instantly. Successful treatment may require psychological and social services, family support, individualized learning

of basic skills at the student's pace, a measured and patient exposure to work, and ongoing social and vocational counseling while the youngster is on the job. That's a large order. But this is a very big problem.

Endnotes

1. Rebecca Maynard, *The Impact of Supported Work on Young School Dropouts*, Volume I of the Final Report on the Supported Work Evaluation (Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, New York: September 1980). See also Hahn and Lerman, *What Works in Youth Employment Policy*?
2. Susan Sadd et al, *Alternative Youth Employment Strategies Project*, (Vera Institute for Justice, New York: 1983).
3. Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, "Jobstart: A Demonstration for High School Dropouts," Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, New York: 1986).
4. The Job Corps research, originally conducted by Charles Mallar and others at the Mathematica Policy Research Inc., is summarized in Hahn and Lerman, *What Works in Youth Employment Policy?*
5. Janet Quint and James Riccio, *The Challenge of Serving Pregnant and Parenting Teens: Lessons from Project Redirection*, (Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, New York: April, 1985).
6. Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, "Literature Review for Project New Chance" (New York: 1986).
7. The Jobs for Youth and 70001 LTD studies were originally conducted by Public/Private Ventures (Philadelphia, 1982) and are reported in Hahn and Lerman, *What Works in Youth Employment Policy?*
8. Public/Private Ventures, *The State Youth Initiatives Project*, Working Paper #8 (Philadelphia, September 1985).

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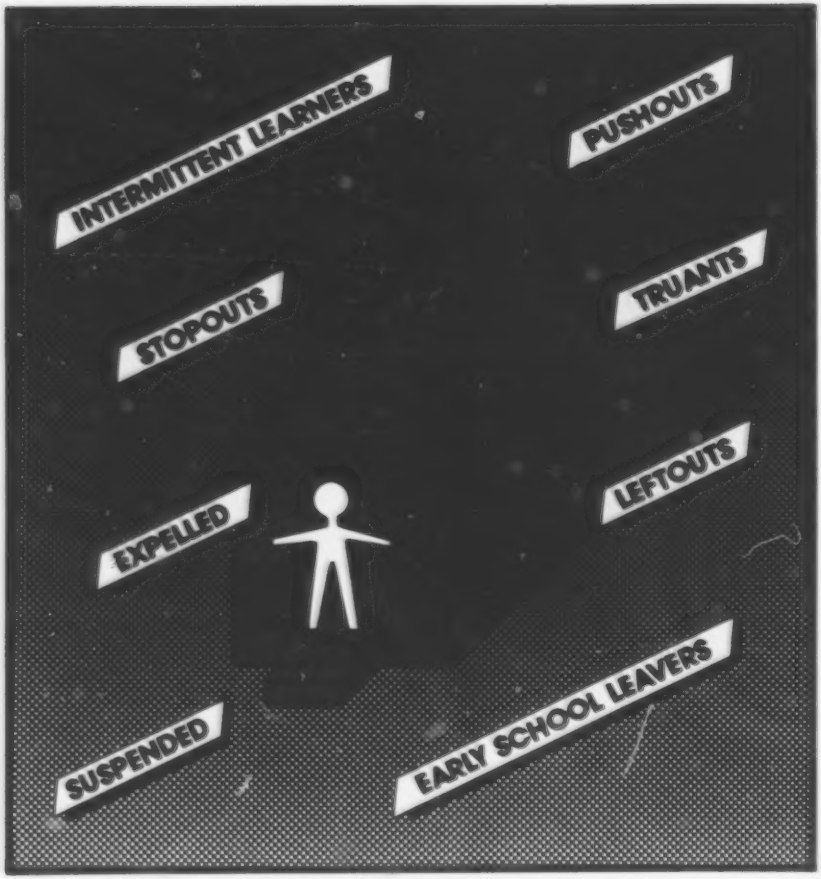
CONCLUDING REMARKS


INTERMITTENT LEARNERS
PUSHOUTS
STOPOUTS
TRUANTS
EXPELLED
LEFTOUTS
SUSPENDED
EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

Chapter Six

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Taken individually, none of the program proposals and policy recommendations represents a fundamental break with examples that can be found in existing programs. But collectively they constitute a comprehensive and potentially successful response to the dropout dilemma.

If schools in disadvantaged communities throughout the country take some responsibility for youngsters who have left as well as those who remain; if they address the family and personal problems of students as well as their academic performance by integrating the educational, health and social service systems; if they restore a lost sense of competency and individual worth by introducing a comprehensive program of remedial instruction; if they offer shut-out adolescents access to the mainstream economy through an integrated strategy of work and study; if they engage both parents and students in a just and fair process that combines discipline, guidance and mentorship—if all of this is done by a sensitive and committed administration and faculty, the schools would be in a better position to overcome the devastating legacies of race and poverty.

These far reaching efforts would be effective for many dropouts as well as at-risk students still in school. These efforts must identify potential school leavers and younger dropouts and offer them an array of services, including alternative schools that address their educational and social needs; a skills training effort that prepares them for employment in jobs offering potential for the future, and ongoing support through counseling and mentorship during a youth's adjustment period in the workplace. The case management approach would customize and individualize services to youngsters who require very different kinds and degrees of assistance.

More than good intentions are required. Serious and sustained collaboration is required from the public and private sectors, federal, state and local governments, educational systems and individual schools and the communities they serve. Above all, a long-term commitment is necessary.

For the past decade, the nation's education system has been buffeted by frequent shifts in priorities. Raise academic requirements in middle-class schools, but simultaneously expect poorly-prepared, defeated students in neglected inner-city schools to respond to more demanding standards. Improve teacher competence in affluent districts, but offer no concurrent inducements to those who teach in the most trying circumstances. Diminish federal involvement in public education, reduce revenues at the local level—and yet expect students and teachers to excel.

These conflicting expectations and changing priorities make it difficult to build on the experience gained from serving dropouts and on the knowledge of the value of early intervention. Policymakers, planners and grantmakers must have the courage to start and stay with programs, and to pay attention to staff development. It is only through the training and retention of high quality practitioners that dropout prevention and reentry services can improve.

Policymakers and grantmakers looking for a quick fix in the dropout field are going to be disappointed. The root problems that are at the core of the dropout phenomenon have many complex causes. Nonetheless, the nation owes it to itself and to the dropout youth of today and tomorrow to develop a coherent, consistent, ongoing system of prevention, remediation and retrieval to deal with the serious problems of school leaving. Nothing less is a national scandal.

For Further Information:

Literature on the dropout problem in America is voluminous and expands almost weekly with the growing number of state and local initiatives. There are a number of organizations which serve as clearinghouses, including a new center at Clemson University, South Carolina, which is just getting under way.

Readers should feel free to write the authors at their respective organizations for assistance in finding resources and information. The Institute for Educational Leadership can help by connecting interested persons to experts in its large national network of practitioners and policymakers in education and related human ser-

vices at the national, state and local levels. The Institute can assist through its policy analysis and policy information services, as well as through Institute based technical assistance. For information, contact Jacqueline Danzberger, Director of Local Improvement Programs (202) 822-8722 or 822-8405.

Brandeis University's Center for Human Resources, Heller Graduate School, (Waltham, Massachusetts 02254) serves as a clearinghouse with support from government agencies and foundations. The Brandeis toll-free line is 1-800-343-4705.

About the Authors:

Andrew Hahn is Assistant Dean of the Heller School for Advanced Studies, Brandeis University and is a nationally recognized expert in the employment/education problems of disadvantaged youth. He is the co-author of the book, *What Works in Youth Employment Policy*. Hahn and his colleagues in Brandeis' Center for Human Resources conduct policy analyses and evaluations for foundations, governments, and industry. The Center is one of the nation's leading organizations providing research and direct assistance to programs serving at-risk youth.

Jacqueline Danzberger is Director, Local Improvement Programs for the Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc. (IEL), and has worked extensively in practice and policy around the issues of at-risk youth, and multi-sector collaboration for education and related public policy issues. She has extensive personal and professional experience in educational governance and serves on national task forces and organizations concerned with at-risk youth. Danzberger has been a consultant to the Ford Foundation, Academy for Educational Development, Brandeis University, New York City Private Industry Council, U.S. Department of Education, SUNY Purchase Weschester School Partnership, and several urban school systems.

ADDENDUM

Comment

Michael A. Bailin
President, Public/Private Ventures

I have been pleased on behalf of Public/Private Ventures to serve on the Advisory Committee for this publication. P/PV's interest and willingness to do so stems from a strong conviction that the dropout problem is perhaps the most serious issue in the youth field, has received inadequate attention at every level of government and in every sector of our society, and should be the focus of intensive investigation and efforts. Our position is echoed clearly in the National Academy of Sciences assessment of YEDPA programs, which recommends that

> school dropouts be given priority status for employment and training programs and research. Program efforts should be shaped to test systematically the alternative methods of addressing the education and employment needs of these youths, and research should focus on the underlying determinants of the dropout phenomenon.

My hope is that this current document will indeed spur interest and awareness among policymakers regarding the dropout problem, and prompt increased work toward solutions. Its sense of urgency and commitment should certainly help do that. And the variety of recommendations it contains for the most part are sensible, and would be helpful if implemented either singly or in combination.

I do have two caveats which, in my judgment, bear centrally on the expectations we can reasonably have about many of the report's recommendations. First, the simple though unfortunate fact is that we do not have adequate research—either regarding implementation or impact—on which to base a judgment regarding many of the programs and policies recommended. That does not mean—and here I agree with the report—that some of these recommendations should not be tried; the problem is much too serious to

hold out for definitive evidence of what works, or what works best.

But we should remain aware of where we have reliable evidence, and where we don't. The report's enthusiasm for doing *something now* blurs that distinction; in a time of ample skepticism and limited monies for social interventions, that distinction may be critical for policymakers, administrators and funding sources. It also helps guide our choices for the very limited monies we have available for further research.

To cite one example: most of us would like to see greater involvement of the business community in dropout programming. And certainly that is a currently "fashionable" element of any youth program model. But the experience of JTPA, and of many of the self-initiated business efforts on behalf of youth around the country, actually works to temper our enthusiasm. The reality is that few of these efforts, under JTPA or otherwise, involve dropouts, and there is no reliable evidence that those few are effective.

We might still argue that business involvement is worthwhile, and should be promoted. I would be reluctant, though, to label it a solution, and would not recommend it without noting the limited evidence we do have about different kinds of business involvement. This approach may indeed be worth trying, but in our enthusiasm for action we must remain careful not to promise results where in fact we have uncertainties.

My second caution pertains to the report's theme—one with which we agree—that services to dropout youth must be comprehensive and integrated. Well over half its recommendations call for institutional reforms—some of them sweeping—that would have the effect of intensifying and linking services better to serve the multiple needs of the dropout population.

But enumerating the needs of these youth and the kinds of systemic changes that would meet them skirts the very real problems of bringing about the kinds of changes the report espouses. P/PV's experience is that the separate goals, procedures and identities of the various youth-serving institutions—in short, their "turf"—are critical barriers to achieving integration and coordination. In fact, these barriers are equal to if not greater than the problems of resources and commitment.

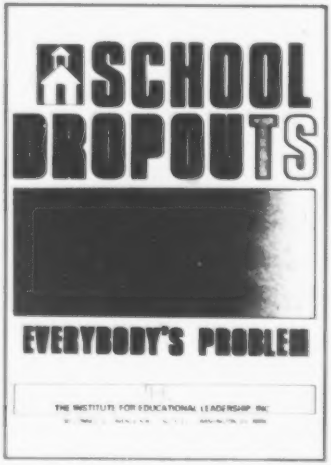
The report only lightly touches on the problem; several times it mentions a state-level Educational Services Corporation to handle dropouts. Yet this notion, however appealing, seems an inade-

quate framework for bringing needed coherence and order to the field. Nor is it clear how it would deal with the various approaches that have been or are being tried to coordinate services within existing institutional frameworks—which may be, politically, a far more realistic course. Until this aspect of the problem is brought into focus, we are left with a series of potentially useful services and policies which, without cohesion, may accomplish little, while again seeming to promise much.

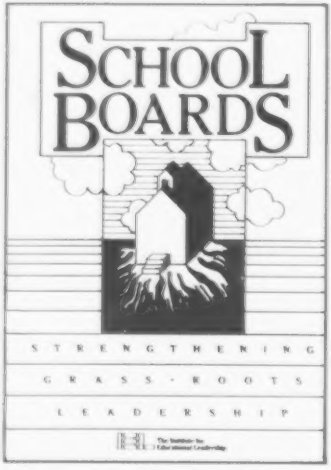
In short, the report does not distinguish adequately between the proven and the merely promising; nor does it develop a coherent framework for its disparate listing of remedies. We are convinced, however, from our own experience and that of others who have looked carefully at the problem, that the dropout phenomenon should command a prominent place on the nation's social agenda. This report is a start in laying out the dimensions of that phenomenon, and listing the many alternative courses of action that should be considered. We hope it will prompt more systematic efforts to understand the problem, and widespread national efforts to put our knowledge and energies to good use.

OTHER IEL PUBLICATIONS

School Dropouts: Everybody's Problem, is an insightful monograph on a critical school dilemma that affects all Americans. The report is based on the conference on School Dropouts sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and organized by IEL. In an effort to mesh public reports with research and local practitioner experience, the conference highlighted demographic data, educators' views, remediation/training programs, promising prevention practices, student perspectives, and collaborative efforts. The report does the same. Copies are available for $5.00 from IEL.* Orders must be prepaid and checks/money orders should be made out to the Institute for Educational Leadership. *(1–10 copies, $5.00; 11–25 copies, $4.25; 25 plus copies, $3.00)



School Boards: Strengthening Grass Roots Leadership examines the current political, social and economic factors influencing the governance and management of local boards of education and their school systems. The foreword is written by Nellie Weil, President of NSBA and Thomas Shannon, NSBA Executive Director, with a preface by Neal Peirce, contributing editor of *The National Journal*. Copies are available for $6.00 each. (1–9 copies, $6.00; 10–25 copies, $4.50; 26 plus copies, $3.00)



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